

Thursday March 26 1998

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The Guardian INTERNATIONAL

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NEWSPAPER OF THE YEAR

Slaughter in American playgrounds

New day, new massacre

G2 with European weather

Spring fiction special

Nick Hornby: about an author

Books in G2

OnLine

The hacker who turned himself in

G2 pages 12-13

They had rifles, pistols and wore camouflage. And, like their victims, they were children



Natalie Brooks, aged 12



Paige Ann Herring, aged 12



Brittany Varner, aged 11



Stephanie Johnson, aged 12

Ed Vulliamy in Washington on national soul searching in wake of US playground killings

THEY were hoing blood from the paving stones outside Westside school in Jonesboro, Arkansas, yesterday as the Bible belt town faced the bitter reckoning of Tuesday's playground massacre: four girls and their English teacher dead.

The teacher had thrown herself into the line of fire to save another pupil. Another teacher, Sara Theford, was in a critical condition.

Meanwhile, the two boys — aged 11 and 13 — arrested after the ambush appeared for a de-

tention hearing yesterday, facing charges of multiple murder and aggressive assault.

The massacre of the innocents has invoked a bout of national soul searching. President Bill Clinton sent instructions from Africa to his attorney-general, Janet Reno, demanding an inquiry into a spate of playground shootings — four in five months across the American South.

"We have to look at all these incidents to see if we can learn anything and if there are any common elements," Mr Clinton said.

The governor of Arkansas, Mike Huckabee, launched an attack on modern culture, saying the shootings showed how television and films had "desensitised our society into a state of callousness and disregard for one another."

"I think what makes all of us angry is that our culture would create the kind of atmosphere where an 11- or 13-year-old student could feel that the way to respond to whatever kind of anger inside them is to take up a whole battery of arms and indiscriminately shoot their fellow students and teachers," he said.

From Dunblane the school board sent its condolences and offered to help with "the great deal of support" that would be needed, "not just for

the relatives of the dead, but also for the injured and indeed all the children and their relatives."

In Washington, the Democratic minority leader in the House of Representatives, Tom Daschle, appealed to Republicans to work on urgent bipartisan legislation on juvenile crime.

The two arrested boys will be tried as juveniles because they are indeed children. The hearings will therefore be closed, the defendants unnamed. If found guilty they will be "delinquent", not criminals. Under Arkansas law, they would have to be released when they came of age on their 18th birthdays.

Exceptional circumstances and appeals from the state prosecutors could have them

imprisoned until aged 21 at the oldest. Fellow pupils yesterday spoke for the first time to give credence to the theory that at least one of the two camouflage-clad boys had uttered threats that they would carry out the attack.

Classmates said the 13-year-old had recently broken up with his girlfriend, Michael Barnes, aged 12, said that one of the boys "talked about doing it... how he was going to bring a knife to school, and how he was going to shoot people. I thought he would never do it, but he did."

Another pupil said the same boy "told me he would kill somebody. I didn't believe him. When I came outside and heard the shooting, I knew it was for real."

Parents described scenes of mayhem and sorrow in the wake of the slaughter, and the first signs of anger were beginning to surface at the school's inertia in following up the boys' threats.

Twyla Clevinger, who rushed to the school for her injured daughter Jamie, said that one boy had boasted he "had some killing to do".

"Obviously no one paid any attention," she said.

Rumours were circulating in Jonesboro last night that police had seized a van said to be connected with what police were calling "an ambush".

Such a discovery would suggest that the youths had procured not only an arsenal of weapons but also a getaway vehicle.

The authorities also said

they had traced the owners of the firearms involved — an assembly of rifles, semi-automatic pistols and other guns.

The dead pupils were named as Natalie Brooks, Paige Ann Herring and Stephanie Johnson, all aged 12, and Brittany Varner, who was aged 11.

Their English teacher joined them on the list of the dead yesterday morning. Shannon Wright, aged 32, had hurled her body in front of 11-year-old Emma Hittman who was in the line of fire.

Emma survived and was recovering in hospital last night. Wright was hailed by parents yesterday as the "Saint of Arkansas".

Leader comment, page 9; G2 front



Teacher Shannon Wright, who died shielding a pupil

Opera House chief's short reign ends on sour note

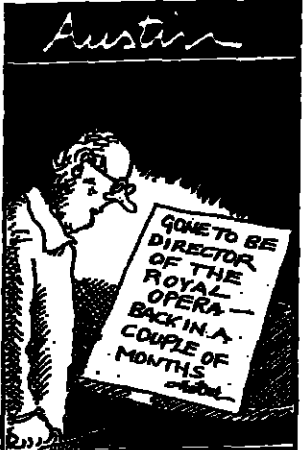
Dan Glatzer Arts Correspondent

MARY ALLEN, chief executive of the Royal Opera House, resigned yesterday after months of pressure and speculation.

Her immediate departure follows a difference of opinion about the management structure of the troubled institution. She leaves after seven months in the £100,000-plus post and will receive six months' salary as part of her severance package.

A statement from the ROH said: "It had become clear that there was a growing difference of views over the future plans for the organisation, which Mary Allen believed should be led by an arts administrator." The ROH board took the view that the institution should be led by an artistic figure.

Composer and ROH board member Michael Berkeley said: "This had been brewing up for a while. It all goes back to the departure of Nicholas Payne. We had to start thinking about who we would appoint in his place." Mr Payne, the director of the Royal Opera, one of the ROH's two



resident companies, announced his departure to the neighbouring English National Opera last month. He is due to leave the ROH in August.

"You could say that Mary forced him out and dug her own grave. We came to the conclusion that the ROH should be artistically led. We asked Mary if she could work as chief executive under a superintendent, and she said absolutely not. She was also quite aware of the groundswell of opinion in the arts

world. It was very hard for her to sustain the pressure. The feeling you get was that this was fairly inevitable."

Ms Allen joined the ROH in May of last year from being secretary general of the Arts Council, which had awarded the ROH £78.5 million Lottery money. This caused her appointment at the ROH under the chairmanship of the former chairman of the Arts Council's Lottery panel to come under scrutiny.

A report into the ROH by Gerald Kaufman's culture, media and sport select committee unravelled the new management team installed by chairman Lord Chiddingfold. His resignation in December was followed by that of the entire board, but Ms Allen stayed on, determined to tough out Mr Kaufman's withering personal criticism.

Referring to her controversial departure from the Arts Council, the report said: "Allen's conduct fell seriously below the standards to be expected of the principal officer of a public body."

Her relations with the ROH's new chairman, Sir Colin Southgate, are understood to have been strained. Ms Allen apparently failed to inform Sir Colin of the possi-



bility that Mr Payne might leave the ROH, and he is understood to have been frustrated at the difficulties in finding people prepared to work with her.

Felham Allen, on secondment from Coopers & Lybrand, takes over as acting chief executive. But there will be a leisurely timetable for replacing her. The appointment, which will be advertised, will be made in the light of the Eyre review, under Sir Richard Eyre, into the provision of lyric theatre in London. The report is due in May.

£905m rip-off over housing benefits

David Hencke Westminster Correspondent

NINETY-NINE per cent of suspected housing benefit fraudsters are getting away "scot free" in fiddling £905 million taxpayers' cash every year, according to a scathing indictment by MPs on the day the Government sets out the framework of its welfare reforms.

The MPs accuse the Department of Social Security of providing a "breeding ground for fraud" by running a scheme needing 500 pages of guidelines and 60 different allowances, premiums, deductions and disregards.

The report reveals that up to 30 million pieces of paper are sent every year between the Benefits Agency and local government to administer some £11.5 billion payments to 4.7 million claimants. It accuses the department of not having "a sufficient grip of what is needed" to tackle fraud.

David Davis, chairman of the Commons public accounts committee, which produced the report, says today: "The resulting waste of public money on housing benefit fraud is massive and inexcusable, and has gone on for far too long. We have serious

doubts about the strength of leadership displayed by the department and about their commitment to reduce the enormous drain on taxpayer's money."

The report comes as Frank Field, social security minister, publishes plans to overhaul the welfare system. He is expected to toughen benefit fraud measures and discuss general principles for weeding out people of housing benefit.

Some Labour MPs last night said Mr Field was touting the idea of scrapping all £11.5 billion of housing benefit payments and giving people vouchers to cover rents instead.

The committee says most of the fraud involves unemployed and low-paid people not declaring earnings so they can get more, or all, of their rent paid. Landlords are responsible for about £150 million of fraud a year by claiming bogus rents.

Top of the list of fraudsters are people who have jobs while claiming to be unemployed. The other main group of fraudsters are lone parents who disguise their incomes.

The vast majority of claimants get between £20 and £25 a week. Some 282,000 get over £75 a week.

The MPs say: "It is totally turn to page 2, column 7

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THE NEW ASTRA VAUXHALL

"On the Monopoly board of small batches, it's Mayfair. With a hotel on it."

WHAT CAR? APRIL 1998

QUALITY IS A RIGHT. NOT A PRIVILEGE.

2 NEWS

Sketch

Whaddya mean 3-1 favourite?



Simon Hoggart

THE bookies' 3-1 favourite to become the new elected mayor of London was watching from the Lords' gallery.

Sometimes it must feel really embarrassing just to be Lord Archer. You've lost and made a fortune, been deputy chairman of the Tory party, sold millions of books around the world, and yet people who would have difficulty composing the words on a discount pizza coupon treat you like a national joke.

Labour's Tony McNulty (Harrow East), for example, stood up during Prime Minister's Questions yesterday and asked Mr Blair to "resist strongly the tempting offer from Lord Archer, who has promised to give up writing if he becomes mayor of London".

"Although this would be a great thing for literature, an Archer mayoralty would be a disaster for London."

Lord Archer smiled beneficently. That was his first mistake. What the Government is proposing is not a glorified ribbon-snapper, moving from old folk's home to school fete.

They want a real American-style mayor, who will regard himself as a gladiator on behalf of his city. Such mayors do not go in for amused self-deprecation. They roar defiantly in the manner of former New York incumbent Ed Koch, or Chicago's Richard Daley.

In particular they express loud contempt for anyone unfortunate enough not to live in their metropolis. When companies suggest they might relocate in, say, Cardiff, the mayor will shout: "And what the hell are you going to do in Cardiff? Sing? Or mine coal, maybe? Am I missing something here? Coal?"

"Glasgow? They got good restaurants in Glasgow? I don't think so — unless you like deep-fried Mars bars.

Review

At the opposite pole to Mamet

Eddie Gibb

In the Solitude of the Cotton Fields
Citizens' Theatre, Glasgow

SOMETHING rather special is happening in the Citizens' tiny studio, but it's not immediately apparent what. For a start, there's been some kind of cock-up. An erratum slip in the programme apologises to the estate of Bernard-Marie Koltès for using an unauthorised translation of the French writer's play, which was first performed in Paris in 1967.

There didn't seem to be much wrong with the version performed here in Glasgow, but there you go. The important point is that director Philip Prowse has stamped his own mark on this very enigmatic play.

In the Solitude of the Cotton Fields was performed in French a couple of years back at the Edinburgh Festival. It was a very physical affair that had turned the sparring match between the two characters into a contact sport. Prowse has gone for a stillness which relied almost entirely on the nuances of Koltès's words. For anyone whose French is not up to Tony Blair standards, the translation — authorised or not — was welcome.

But still the question remains what Solitude is about.

The minimalist set is of a public toilet with strip lights, an overflowing basket of paper towels and white ceramic tiling.

Except everything is topsy-turvy, with the basket at-

tached to the ceiling and the lighting on the floor. The neon strip and white electrical ducting divide up the floor space in a way that suggests a tennis court.

What follows is indeed a verbal rally, but played in ultra-slow motion as the characters hold court with lengthy speeches. This is the polar opposite of David Mamet's overlapping dialogue.

Solitude plays out a meeting between two strangers, Koltès and his character, who are both looking out the meaning in this encounter between two men whose future has become inter-dependent simply because their paths have crossed.

The Dealer (Andrew Joseph) suggests he has what the Client wants; the Client (Robert David MacDonald) maintains that he is not in the market for the unspecified goods on sale. Koltès has used his deal as a metaphor for human relations.

The yin and yang of their encounter is emphasised by the fact that, in the reverse of what you would expect, the Dealer has a rather Zen sales pitch which he delivers sitting crossed-leg on a rug, while the Client wears a smart business suit. For an hour they gently probe the significance of their chance encounter with a quietness that is almost meditative.

The control of the two actors is remarkable as they make this dual of quiet words completely absorbing.

Rarely has the existential angst of two characters "thrown together in the black box of a studio theatre seemed so compelling. Prowse and his cast have surpassed the challenge of Koltès's difficult play.

Man held in hunt for killer

Geoffrey Gibbs

DETECTIVES investigating the murder of Exeter schoolgirl Kate Bushell were continuing last night to question a local man aged 20, who was arrested yesterday.

Kate, 14, was killed last November a few hundred yards from her home while taking a neighbour's dog for a walk. Her father, Jeremy, found her body as he helped police

in their search after she failed to return home. Her throat had been slashed and her clothing disturbed.

In a brief statement yesterday officers leading the investigation said a 20-year-old Exeter man was assisting officers at the Heavitree Road police station.

Police have so far carried out more than 4,000 house-to-house inquiries and taken 4,000 DNA samples and 5,000 fingerprints.

Private and state pupils perform similarly in exams but elite colleges and firms take 'best school' applicants

School fees buy status gain

John Carvel
Education Editor

ACADEMICALLY able children at the top fee-paying schools do little better at A level than contemporaries of similar ability at state comprehensives, according to research published today by the Institute of Education at London University.

But parents choosing the private sector may still be getting value for money from investing up to £100,000 in school fees. They appear to be buying their children a crucial competitive edge that gets them into more prestigious universities with better career prospects.

The study discovered what happened to a sample of 347 pupils in the top third of the national ability range who started at different types of secondary school in the mid-1990s. About half attended highly-academic independent schools, either on full fees or with support from the Government assisted places scheme. The rest went to state schools, either selective grammar schools or comprehensives.

The overwhelming majority fulfilled their educational promise — irrespective of the type of institution attended," said the report of the research team led by Geoff Whitty, the institute's professor of the sociology of education.

Almost all achieved at least five good passes at GCSE and

92 per cent got A levels. The average A level subject grade for pupils at independent schools was worth 7.7 points on the university admissions scale (which gives 10 points for an A grade, eight for a B, six for a C, four for a D and two for an E). The average subject grade for grammar school pupils was 7.3 and for comprehensive pupils it was 6.5.

So at A level, there was less than a grade separating the students at different types of school. But fee-paying pupils tended to be entered for more subjects and they left school with an average of 23.1 points at A level, compared with 16.5 points for comprehensive pupils. The fee-payers may also have had higher aspirations and better networks.

As a result, tiny differences in subject grade averages were converted into a huge difference in outcomes. "Students who went to independent schools were more than twice as likely to go to elite universities as those who went to state schools," the researchers concluded.

More than 40 per cent of the fee-payers went to Oxford, Cambridge, or one of a small number of prestige universities, compared with less than 17 per cent of state pupils. One in eight of the fee-payers went to "third rank" universities such as the former polytechnics, compared with nearly two in five of state pupils.

The privately-educated pupils were more likely to take degrees in traditional, non-vo-

national subjects and more likely to get quickly into higher-status jobs. Half the graduates of elite universities were in top-class professional positions by their mid-20s, compared with one in 20 of those who went to third rank institutions.

Sally Power, a lecturer at Bristol University and senior member of the research team, said she was surprised at the similarity in A level subject scores at independent schools and comprehensives. But the averages masked big differences between individual schools.

There was a 20-point gap in the average A level point scores of the best and worst-performing independent schools and only a 10-point gap in comprehensives.

Ms Power said the importance of choice of university was even more astonishing. "Where you get your degree seems to be absolutely crucial to the level at which you enter work," she said.

The researchers found that students' eventual success depended more on their parents' educational background than on the type of school attended.

"Those whose parents had higher education were more likely to attend university than those whose parents had no higher education," they said.

But children of parents with few academic qualifications had greater difficulty realising their potential in comprehensives than at independent schools.

Dead boy's mother accuses police



South African High Commissioner Cheryl Carolus (centre) with Neville and Doreen Lawrence at the inquiry yesterday

PHOTOGRAPH: PETER JORDAN

'I felt the police were not doing anything and they were too busy investigating Stephen'

Doreen Lawrence, mother of Stephen, above

The anger and anguish of Mrs Lawrence

David Pallister

THE mother of murdered teenager Stephen Lawrence yesterday spoke of her anger and frustration at the lack of information from police about their investigation into the racist killing.

In a statement read to the public inquiry into the case, Doreen Lawrence, 45, said the police officers who visited her house were well known in the area. That the police knew that they had knives, that they always clean the knives in the front room and people have seen them, and it is something the police are aware of.

One particular incident left her in shock when a senior officer appeared contemptuous about information she gave him on the suspects.

Within days of the murder

in April 1993 in Eltham, south London, local people began calling with information about the identities of the likely killers — members of a violent gang who called themselves the Krays. The messages were kept in a book.

"As days went by we were never made aware of anything that was happening. That was the frustration of the whole thing. They [the police] must have an idea of who they are... that these boys were well known in the area. That the police knew that they had knives, that they always clean the knives in the front room and people have seen them, and it is something the police are aware of."

"I had the feeling that if people in the community

knew what was going on and who was responsible the police should arrest them."

"I felt the police were not doing anything and they were too busy investigating Stephen."

Two weeks after the murder she and other members of the family had their first meeting with two senior officers in the case, Detective Chief Superintendents John Phillipot and William Iley. Mrs Lawrence took a list of the names from the message book.

"I handed the paper to Iley. I remember sitting very quiet, listening to what was happening around me and watching Iley to see what he was doing. That is when I saw him fold the paper up so small and I do not think I said any-

thing. I was in too much of a shock by what I saw."

"We were not told anything, nobody was being arrested and it just dawned on me at that time as if they had no intention of doing anything about Stephen's murder. That is when I started taking an active role."

On the same day, Mr and Mrs Lawrence met Nelson Mandela in an attempt to highlight the case. "As a result of that meeting, the following day they arrested somebody."

Mrs Lawrence's statement, read by junior barrister, Margot Boyle-Anscombe, described the family's history up to the inquest on Stephen in December 1996.

By that time the Crown Prosecution Service had de-

cided not to prosecute five white youths who had been charged with the killing. On learning this, she said: "I was angry and shocked. I wanted to know what the hell was going on. We had no idea why they were dropping the charges."

A private prosecution by the family against three of the five collapsed in 1996.

Mrs Lawrence, born like her husband, Neville, in Jamaica, described a close, religious and hard-working family. Stephen, 18, was a bright, popular, athletic boy, who hoped to go to university to study architecture.

At the time of his death she was an adult student taking a BA in humanities.

Although she had never experienced racist abuse, she

said the area was tense. "I did not trust the police, never have done, and I still do not trust the police."

On the night of the murder she and her husband went looking for Stephen after a neighbour said he had been attacked. They drove to Brook Hospital where they were told Stephen had died. "He looked as though he was just sleeping. There was no pain in his face. I kissed him and more or less cuddled him."

After the family buried Stephen in Jamaica they returned to London but stayed with relatives. Earlier their car tyres had been slashed and some white youths were seen watching the house. "I personally always felt a target," she said.

The inquiry continues.

Livingstone faces mayoral snub

Labour plans to stop leftwinger standing for new London post

Even Macaskill, Chief Political Correspondent

THE Labour leadership is to mount a campaign to block one of its own MPs, Ken Livingstone, from standing for mayor of London.

Only hours before the Government published a white paper detailing its plan to give London its first directly-elected mayor, Mr Livingstone ended weeks of speculation by confirming he intended to put his name forward.

Mr Livingstone, nicknamed "Red Ken" when he ran the Greater London Council, secured high public ratings until Baroness Thatcher abolished the GLC 12 years ago.

The Labour machine faces a tough battle. When Mr Livingstone stood against the Minister without Portfolio, Peter Mandelson, for the party's national executive last October, the leadership pre-

dicted he would lose but the party rank-and-file decided otherwise.

The leadership is openly hostile to the idea of having a leftwinger in charge of the capital. Nick Reynolds, the minister responsible for London, said: "He has spent much of the last year opposing the proposals. It is a remarkable about-turn."

Although he indicated his desire to run, Mr Livingstone remained critical yesterday of the Government's plans. His concern is that a directly-elected mayor will not be sufficiently accountable without a strong assembly. He also wants the new body to have direct tax-raising powers.

Mr Livingstone said: "If Londoners had the same level of public expenditure as Scots have, there would be around £4.4 billion a year to spend on essential services, which puts the £2.7 billion needed for the Tube over 15 years into context."



Ken Livingstone: critical of government scheme

The party leadership will claim it cannot put forward a candidate someone who has been so critical of the plan.

One minister was adamant that Mr Livingstone would not be allowed to run: "We have deliberately not made a martyr out of him. He thought we might put a proposal in the white paper to bar new-joining Labour MPs. We have not done that but he will not get through

the selection process."

The first hurdle will be a referendum in London on May 7 on whether to have an elected mayor. If the public agrees — and polls indicate it will — a bill will be introduced in the autumn. The election of the mayor will be late next year or early 2000.

A Labour minister said the likely candidate will be someone who has not yet been mentioned: "The serious people have kept quiet so far."

Frank Dobson, the Health Secretary, has emerged, billed as Tony Blair's preferred choice. But though he is committed to London and has a detailed knowledge of its politics, the former Cabinet council leader has told friends he does not want the job.

Mr Livingstone faces competition from Glenda Jackson, the London transport minister. Trevor Phillips, the broadcaster and friend of Mr Mandelson, has also been tipped.

£905m rip-off as housing fraudsters go scot free

continued from page 1

unacceptable that seven years after we last looked at this issue, housing benefit fraud should exceed £900 million, and the department still does not have information to show whether fraud is increasing, or all the information they need on the types of fraud, including landlord fraud, and local level."

They add: "Fear of detection can be an effective deterrent against fraud, but only if prosecutions and effective penalties. Yet the level of prosecutions by local authorities is incredibly low, at under 1 per cent of detected frauds, and fraudsters have a 99 per cent chance of getting off scot free."

Figures released to the MPs show that in the 1996/7 financial year, 182 of 380 local authorities did not prosecute a single person. Another 88 person just three authorities prosecuted more than 16 people.

The committee also attacks the present system as too

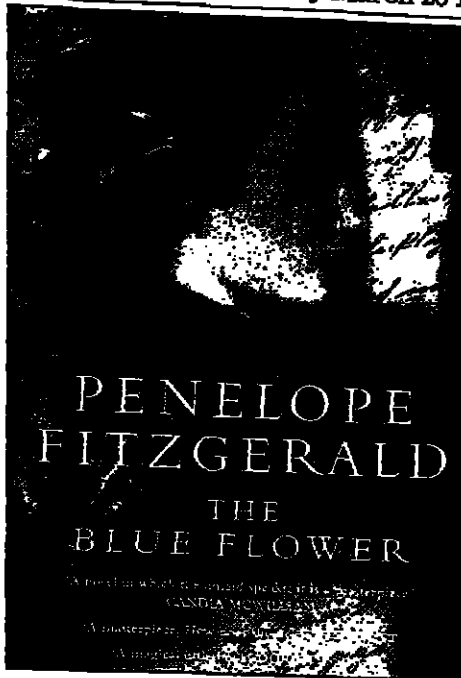
complex and too open to abuse. "The complexity exposes genuine claimants to confusion, inadvertent error by omission, and the risk of investigation; confuses administrators leading to high levels of errors in payments; and provides a breeding ground for fraud."

The MPs also criticise the ministry for laxity in policing income support and jobseekers' allowances benefits. "This failure provides a gateway to fraud in housing benefit."

The DSS has recently launched a benefit fraud inspectorate, which has begun work by launching a blitz in Blackpool to strengthen checks on claimants.

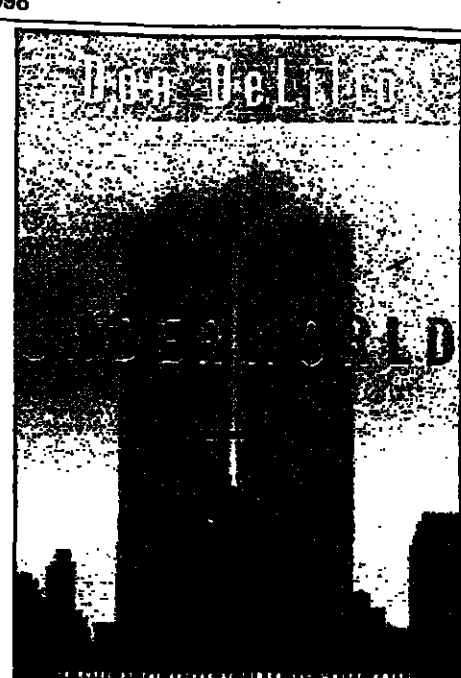
John Denham, junior social security minister, confirmed that proposals to tackle benefit fraud would be included in today's green paper.

He said: "This report underlines that we have inherited a benefit system which is seriously afflicted by fraud. We have already taken significant steps to tackle benefit fraud and more will be done."



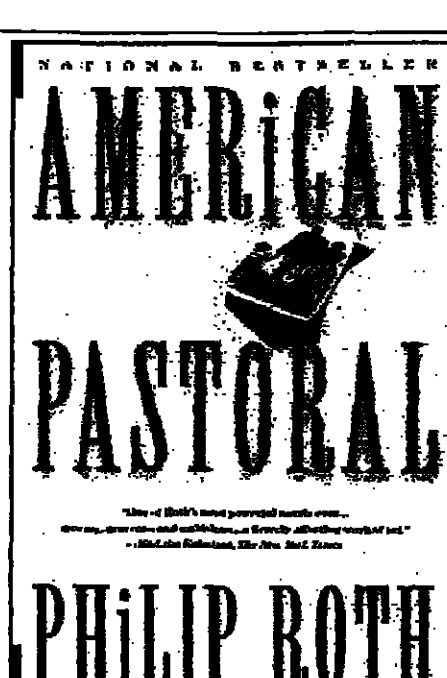
What the critics said:
It is strongly physical, evocative. There are many characters and most of them are individuated sharply — Guardian

This is a curious book, beautifully crafted in its mannered way — Independent



What the critics said:
Quite simply, a dazzling achievement: a novel that seems to touch on every major cultural, social and political theme of American life over the past 50 years — Daily Telegraph

A pompousness in this novel suggests not so much epic ambition as epic confusion — Guardian



What the critics said:
The grace and rigour of Roth's prose, the exasperated humour and depth of feeling worthy of Updike, move and surprise — Irish Times

It is a calmer, more approachable enterprise by far: rueful, rich and, simply as straight narrative, entirely gripping — Sunday Telegraph



What the critics said:
A poetic account of hardship, violence and longing, which has drawn comparisons with Joseph Conrad — Daily Telegraph

It's a very handsome and leisurely sort of book, moving towards its tragic denouement with sureness and solidity — Mail on Sunday

I'm a literary star, so no ironing

At the age of 82, novelist Penelope Fitzgerald keeps her cool after scooping the top US book award

Stuart Miller

SHE is 82 and did not write her first serious novel until she was almost 60. But yesterday Penelope Fitzgerald was coming to terms with achieving what Kate Winslet and the other British Oscar hopefuls failed to do — beating the Americans in their own backyard.

To the astonishment of the guests assembled at a glittering ceremony in downtown Manhattan, Fitzgerald beat off the cream of heavyweight American literature to win the prestigious National Book Critics Circle fiction prize.

Up against her ninth novel, *The Blue Flower*, had been ranged American novels lauded as among the greatest of their era: Don DeLillo's *Underworld* (for which its publishers paid a rumoured \$1.3 million), Philip Roth's *American Pastoral*, and Charles Frazier's *Cold Mountain*.

It was, as Art Winslow, the NBCC's president, put it, "a very, very, very difficult choice".

To add to the shock, this was the first year in which non-US writers have been eligible for the prize, which is nominated by more than 600

literary editors and book reviewers across the US.

Another foreign writer, Peruvian-born Mario Vargas Llosa, received the criticism prize for *Making Waves*.

There is no cash prize, but the high-profile award guarantees massive publicity and increased sales for the winner.

Yesterday Ms Fitzgerald was resting at her granny flat in Highgate, north London, as she struggled to come to terms with her success. Informed of the victory by her American editor, Chris Carruth, who told her to celebrate, she replied: "You're right. I shan't do the ironing today."

She told the Guardian: "I am astounded. To tell you the truth I didn't really know about the award. My publishers had entered it and I didn't really pay attention because I thought I had no chance of winning."

So certain was she that she had no chance of winning, Ms Fitzgerald refused persistent requests from her US publishers for ideas for an acceptance speech.

"Even to be on the shortlist was such an honour, so to win is such a surprise," she said.

She admitted that she had not read the other books on the shortlist — although, like

many, she had started but not finished *Underworld*.

Despite winning the Booker Prize in 1979 for *Offshore*, and being shortlisted a further three times, Ms Fitzgerald has never attained the popular success which her supporters say she deserves. Her gentle historical fiction combines fine writing with accessibility.

The victory confirms Ms Fitzgerald's status as an almost overnight sensation in the US. Less than a year ago, her books sold less than 3,000 copies in paperback.

The Blue Flower, which first appeared in paperback, is now into its 10th print run with 100,000 copies in circulation.

Her big break in the US was the decision by the Boston-based publisher, Houghton, to use *The Blue Flower*, which charts the origins of 18th century German Romanticism, as the flagship for a new paperback imprint, Mariner Books.

An intensive marketing campaign secured high-profile reviews, including the front cover of the New York Review of Books. By the end of next year, all nine of her novels will be available in America.

Back in London, Ms Fitzgerald revealed the secret of her success. "When I wrote my first novel, my publisher threw away the last eight chapters. He told me nobody wanted to read such long books. I have always stuck to that ever since."



Penelope Fitzgerald: American award guarantees sales rise

PHOTOGRAPH: TARA HEINEMAN

Authors and their auras

PENELOPE FITZGERALD, 82

Since winning the Booker Prize in 1979 for her second novel, *Offshore*, Fitzgerald has come to be identified with writers such as Sebastian Faulks and Pat Barker, who are credited with bringing a new respectability to historical fiction.

Consisting of 56 brief chapters, *The Blue Flower* takes as its inspiration the early life of the German poet-philosopher, Novalis, and his love affair with Sophie, a sweet, dim 12-year-old.

The daughter of E.V. Knox, who was editor of Punch, Fitzgerald did not begin writing seriously until she was almost 60. She still writes in pen and ink — "for the worldly motive that I can sell the manuscripts".

DON DELILLO, 61

When it was published in the United States, DeLillo's 11th novel, the 827-page *Underworld* made a massive impact. Beginning with a 25,000-word description of a famous baseball game in the early 1960s, it portrays a 40-year history of living in the shadow of the bomb.

The hype for the book subsided in this country, with critics failing to agree about its quality. But it still became a bestseller — although doubts about whether many readers make it all the way through prompted one reviewer to call it a "rebuttle at bedtime".

Six years in the writing, *Underworld* was hailed as elevating DeLillo to the status of one of America's greatest living novelists.

PHILIP ROTH, 65

Described as "postwar fiction's leading exponent of delinquency", his previous novels, written over two decades, notably the psychosexual extravaganza *Portnoy's Complaint*, were doubting and obsessive scrutinies of his imagination and desires.

The image was underlined by the memoirs of his ex-wife, British actress Claire Bloom, who married him in 1990 after an 18-year relationship. Roth is characterised as prone to furious anger attacks and childish tantrums.

American Pastoral rages against the freedoms of the permissive society, telling the story of a Swedish-American Jew and his experience of the American dream.

CHARLES FRAZIER, 47

Cold Mountain, Frazier's first novel, has taken the literary world by storm. A romantic epic set in the American Civil War, its film rights have been snapped up for \$1.25 million by the director of *The English Patient*, Anthony Minghella. The book also picked up the US National Book Award last November.

The bare bones of the novel come from an ancestral tale Frazier was given by his father. He transformed it into an American odyssey, charting the journey of a Confederate deserter on his long walk home through the South.

He is a former university lecturer in early American literature, who breeds horses.

Blair accused of fudge on euro to achieve currency target

Michael White in London, Martin Walker in Brussels and Mark Miller in Frankfurt

THE Conservatives last night accused Tony Blair of conniving in a "euro-fudge" to allow 11 nations to launch the single currency next year.

The Commons row followed the European Commission's declaration that 11 nations have met the criteria to join the European single currency — despite strong claims that several countries have not. The commission's recommendation will almost certainly be endorsed by the European finance ministers in two months' time — at a meeting to be chaired by the Chancellor, Gordon Brown — allowing the euro to formally come into being in 1999.

Challenged repeatedly by William Hague at Question Time, the Prime Minister promised that the British EU presidency would "do our duty" to both British and European economic interests

in deciding whether the Maastricht criteria for euro-membership had been met.

"I certainly agree that it is important for the single currency to work for Britain whether we are in or out of it," Mr Blair told the Tory leader.

"It is our duty as President of the EU to make sure the

Ex-chancellor Lamont said the recommendation showed the single currency was 'a purely political project'.

criteria are properly obeyed. We will do. If you read the report carefully, you will see there are a range of criteria set out."

The nub of the Euro-sceptics' case is that Italy and Belgium have national debts twice the Maastricht-permitted level of 60 per cent of gross national product, and that other countries, including Germany, have only temporarily got their short-term

debt under control.

Mr Hague pressed Mr Blair six times to admit the commission had "fudged the criteria" in ways that would damage the EU's — and Britain's — prospects for economic and monetary union (EMU).

Mocking claims that the "tendency" of the direction of

debt levels, one of the key criteria for membership, was moving in the right direction, Mr Hague called it "more ostentatious than EMU".

Ironically, Britain's qualifications are better than most. But the Chancellor, Mr Brown insists that, while he is committed in principle, he is setting his own economic tests before deciding on UK entry — almost certainly not in the lifetime of this Parliament. Tory and Labour Euro-

sceptics, who have failed to make much impact since being blamed for John Major's election rout, joined forces to signal a final effort to derail the project — or at least ensure that Britain stays well clear of it.

Ex-chancellor Norman Lamont said the commission's recommendation showed the single currency was "a purely political project".

The shadow chancellor, Peter Lilley, said a fudged single currency would be a weak one, sending the pound even higher at a time when manufacturing is edging towards recession.

"Gordon Brown has a duty to British industry to ensure that the rules on convergence are kept to scrupulously," he said.

Mr Lamont asked: "How can anyone believe in the impartial rule of law in the EU any longer? Treaties are meaningless and ignored when they are inconvenient. Politics drives all."

Door opens wider, page 12

Find Ulster peace by April 9, parties told

Rory Carroll

GORGE Mitchell, the Northern Ireland peace talks chairman, sliced through doubt, division and pessimism yesterday by setting April 9 as the deadline for agreement.

Parties will eat, sleep and negotiate five days a week at Stormont until the emergence of a deal which could end centuries of conflict.

"The time for discussion is over. It's now time for decision," Mr Mitchell said.

Komle Flanagan, the RUC Chief Constable, added fresh impetus by absolving the IRA leadership from recent violence, which threatened to cause the expulsion of Sinn Féin from the talks.

Foot-dragging unionists and nationalists who expected the informal April 9 deadline to be extended had a fire put under them by Senator Mitchell's bullish announcement.

"I believe strongly we can and will reach an agreement," he said. "The participants have been negotiating for nearly two years. The participants know what needs to be done. It's now time to do it. Failure is unacceptable. Those who are determined to wreck the process cannot be allowed to prevail. We are going to stay in session until we get this job done."

"It could be discussed for another two years or 20 years. But there has to be a decision and the only way to bring this to conclusion is to require a decision to be made."

Mr Mitchell said the emphasis would be on intensive one-to-one discussions between the parties. Smaller tables and improved decorum intended to jolly the atmosphere greeted participants when they returned this week.

Earlier the talks received a fillip at a press conference when Mr Flanagan cleared the Provisional IRA of involvement in recent bombings and blamed two anti-peace process splinter groups.

The Chief Constable pointed the finger at Continuity IRA and an as-yet-unnamed group of dissidents who defected from the IRA last year, joining the organ-

sation's former

Both groups were blamed for recent attacks, including Tuesday's mortar attack on a police station at Forkhill, South Armagh.

IRA members were involved in last month's killing of a Catholic man and had offered bomb-making expertise, but without the sanction of the IRA leadership, said Mr Flanagan.

Had he said otherwise, unionists would have accused Mo Mowlam, the Secretary of State, of turning a blind eye for the sake of keeping Sinn Féin in the talks.

The setting of an official deadline was publicly welcomed by all parties, a predictable reaction since even the sceptical want to be seen to be constructive and avoid blame if the talks fail.

Ken Maginnis, the Ulster Unionists' security spokesman, said: "We will do anything that is possible and within reason to expedite an agreement. We will do what we can to help."

Billy Hutchinson of the Progressive Unionist Party said the chances of a settlement were better than ever but warned of violence as the deadline approached.

"There will be parties who don't accept what comes out of this and the closer we get the more violence there could be," he said.

In Dublin, an aide to Bertie Ahern, the Taoiseach, played down comments made in the Irish parliament on Tuesday in which Mr Ahern expressed doubt about the talks' Easter deadline.

Setting a deadline to focus minds was the main lesson drawn from the conflict resolution models of South Africa and the former Yugoslavia. The summer's marching season, which inflames tensions and inhibits compromise, is another reason for the Easter deadline.

Meanwhile a sixth Loyalist Volunteer Force prisoner joined a hunger strike at the Maze prison in protest at a 28-hour-a-day lock-up on the group's wings.

LVF inmates vowed to join the protest at the rate of one a day until the lifting of restrictions imposed after the killing of suspect David Keys.

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Small but perfectly formed



Baby Scipionyx is best-preserved dinosaur find and a first for Italy

Tim Radford
Science Editor

SCIPIONYX is nine inches long and 115 million years old. It still has its baby teeth. Its discovery could be the biggest event around in the dinosaur realm.

Scipionyx sammiticus is the first dinosaur found in Italy, the first of a new kind of dinosaur, and the most perfectly preserved specimen of any dinosaur yet unearthed.

Cristiano Dal Sasso of the Milan natural history museum and Marco Signore of the Federico II university of Naples tell the story behind a palaeontological hat-trick in Nature today. About 113 million years ago, Scipionyx was a tiny carnivorous hatchling splashing around in a chalky seashore lagoon in what is now the Benevento

province of southern Italy. Its life was short: no cause of death is known, and there is no sign of attack.

Practically all of its little bones are perfectly articulated along its 237mm body. Scipionyx lay where it died, on its left side on the lagoon floor, head tilted upwards as if in death throes. Then something peculiar happened: the oxygen levels in the lagoon fell dramatically, decomposition stopped. Mud covered the little birdlike creature and kept it safe.

Its hind feet and tail are missing: the scientists cannot tell why. Scipionyx was collected in a limestone quarry by an amateur who thought it was a fossilised bird. Only after seeing the movie Jurassic Park did he realise he might have a dinosaur. He took it to Cristiano Dal Sasso to be identified. Nobody can guess what



Scipionyx sammiticus, above left in fossil form, and above in a full-size model at Milan's natural history museum

FOSSIL PHOTOGRAPH: SOPRINTENDENZA ARCHEOLOGICA, SALERNO

happened to its skin. The skull is flattened by 100 million years of pressure, which squeezed all traces of the brain away. The liver has gone, but a stain in the rock shows where it lay. The hatchling's intestine and pectoral muscles are visible. The skull and jaw

are so well preserved that the researchers could identify the teeth as juvenile. They named it Scipionyx after the Roman soldier Scipio Africanus — and after Scipione Breislak, the scientist who first examined the strata in which the dinosaur was found. They

named it sammiticus after Samnium, the ancient name of the province. "We have many footprints in Italy," said Marco Signore yesterday, "and there are rumours of a find in the Trieste area. But this is absolutely the first Italian dinosaur."

Jail officers suspended over death

Sarah Hall

SEVERN prison officers at a privately-run jail were last night suspended on full pay after an inquest jury ruled that a remand prisoner, put in a neck hold in contravention of Prison Service regulations during a struggle, was unlawfully killed.

After 3½ hours, the jury unanimously found that Alton Manning, aged 33 — the third black man to die in prison while under restraint between October and December 1995 — died of asphyxia after the warders held him face down at Blakenhurst prison, near Redditch, Worcestershire in December 1995.

The Prison Service immediately suspended the officers pending a decision by the Crown Prosecution Service on whether to bring charges. During the hearing, the coroner took the unusual step of referring the case back to the CPS, who were last night unable to confirm if a second investigation would be launched.

The Prison Service said the coroner's findings would be studied in detail and discussed with the prison's management, United Kingdom Detention Services.

"I am determined to ensure that the full facts of this case have been established, that lessons have been learned and appropriate action taken," added the Prison Service's deputy director general, Tony Pearson.



'One asks how many more people have to die in these circumstances before they learn to do the right thing?'

Raju Bhatt, solicitor, on the death of Alton Manning (left)

However, a Prison Service spokesman said a full investigation into the incident was not deemed necessary, and insisted a second contract with UKDS for a prison in Salford would be unaffected.

The verdict, at Kidderminster town hall, drew allegations of a cover-up and criticism of practices at Blakenhurst, and of the Prison Service. Deborah Coles, co-director of the campaign group Inquest, said the death was a "shocking indictment of the failure at individual and management level within Blakenhurst and the UKDS, as well as the Prison Service to learn lessons from previously violent deaths in prisons."

She called for a CPS investigation, and a Home Office inquiry into the death and those of Kenneth Severin and Den-

nis Stevens, black men who also died while under restraint in prison between October and December 1995.

Raju Bhatt, solicitor for the dead man's family, accused those involved in a Home Office internal inquiry into the death of a "cover-up", which "purported to exonerate all the officers." He added: "One asks how many more people have to die in these circumstances before they learn to do the right thing?"

During the inquest, two jail inmates described how Manning, from Birmingham, was held in a neck lock across his throat after a scuffle with guards. One said: "Manning was struggling. At first only one officer had a hold on him then others arrived and he was carried face down, with an officer on each leg and each arm and one on the neck."

Homeless charities get £27m lottery cash

David Brindle, Social Services Correspondent

MORE than £27 million from the National Lottery is today allocated to voluntary groups working with the homeless. Shelter will get £1.1 million.

The grants represent more than a quarter of a £100 million pay-out by the National Lottery Charities Board under the twin themes of "im-

proving people's living environment" and voluntary-sector development.

Some £3.6 million will go to 34 animal projects, on the basis that they benefit humans. Blue Cross will get £180,000 to develop a national "pet loss befriending service" — a telephone helpline.

But where the board is expecting controversy to focus, as it did last year, is on £3 million in grants for refugee groups. Schemes include the

Carla Latin American welfare group, which gets £28,000 for a housing advice service in London, and the British Refugee Council, which receives £187,000 to develop quality standards for refugee groups. Paul Hensby, the board's director of communications, said: "These are all about helping refugees become more self-sufficient, the better to contribute to the economy rather than take money out of it."

Blair hails Britain's super-rich Asians

Vivek Chaudhary

THEY are proclaimed the paragons of success and endeavour whose rise from rags to riches has seen them take their place in British folklore as the epitome of hard-working immigrants.

Having had his fingers burnt with the pop pack, Tony Blair decided to rub shoulders with the ethnic pack last night at a gathering of Britain's 200 wealthiest Asians in central London.

Accompanied by his wife, Cherie, who wore an embroidered sari, Mr Blair praised entrepreneurs at the dinner, held to mark the release of a list of Britain's wealthiest Asians. Between them, they are worth £7.5 billion, own a number of household brands and employ 300,000 people around the world. And Mr Blair described them as "a credit to the country as a whole, not just the Asian community."

Leading the way are Lakshmi and Umesh Mittal, who own a multi-national steel company worth £2

billion, followed by the Hinduja family, worth £1.2 billion, with extensive interests in industry and oil.

Others include 21-year-old Ruben Singh, worth an estimated \$45 million, who owns a fashion accessory chain, and Shami Ahmed, owner of the Joe Bliggs fashion label, valued at \$60 million.

The presence of the Blairs was proof of Labour's keenness to woo wealthy Asians, who have traditionally favoured the Tories and seen Labour as a hindrance rather than a help to business.

But as Mr Blair tucked into his samosas, surrounded by the super-rich, the list and Labour's support for it, left others in the Asian community with a sour taste in their mouths.

Campaigners claim the list paints a misleading picture of the success of Britain's Asian community. Few in the top 10 made their money in Britain and many on the list come from wealthy families. Most successful Asian businesses are in the food, clothing and retail sectors.

Many originated from east Africa, and had made substantial money before coming to Britain.

Sumesh Grover, of the Southall Monitoring Group, said: "While there is no doubt that there are some success stories, we also have to ask the question, at what price? Many Asian workers are poorly paid and work in terrible conditions, often in companies owned by other Asians. At the end of the day, a businessman is a businessman and it doesn't matter what the race is."

According to the latest government figures, unemployment rates for people of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin stand at 22 per cent compared with the national average of about 6 per cent.

Kamaljeet Jandu, policy worker on ethnic issues at the Trades Union Congress, said: "We have a situation where a few people have done well but the reality is totally different for the majority of Asians. This list does not give a complete picture and there is a danger of replacing old stereotypes with new ones."

Withdrawal of front line Navy vessel undermines strike capacity against Saddam

Gulf heat on 'jump' jets forces carrier to abandon Iraq patrol

David Fairhall
Defence Correspondent

THE aircraft carrier HMS Illustrious, symbol of Britain's commitment to back the American threat of military force against Iraq, will shortly be withdrawn from the Gulf because its Harrier aircraft cannot cope with the heat.

The withdrawal, only weeks after the carrier arrived to replace HMS Invincible, is doubly embarrassing for the Ministry of Defence. Not only does it demonstrate the serious operational limitations of vertically-landing Harriers in such hot conditions, it brings to an abrupt

halt the carefully orchestrated build-up in which a British carrier was moved to the Gulf, intended by the Foreign Office to increase pressure on the Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein to accept United Nations weapons inspections.

The UN inspectors returned to Baghdad this week to find what their leader Richard Butler described as "a new spirit of constructiveness" among Iraqi officials.

But if Saddam again becomes obstructive, Washington and London may want to resume the threat of air strikes just as Illustrious turns for home in mid-April.

The Harrier's problem is that unlike other aircraft, which use the lift of their wings to take off and land

from long runways, it launches itself from a short "ski jump" on the carrier's deck, and then lands vertically.

This means that especially when landing, it must support its entire weight on the downward thrust of its jet engine — whose thrust is critically reduced when it sucks in hot air.

The potential danger was emphasised last November, when even in much cooler weather an RAF Harrier GR7 crashed into the Mediterranean while attempting to land at night on Invincible, the ship to replace Illustrious. The navy pulled off a remarkable operation to recover the aircraft before it sank, and rescue the pilot as he ejected.

Illustrious carries eight RAF GR7s fitted for laser-guided bombing and eight naval air defence Sea Harriers. Both types of aircraft will become too risky to operate as Gulf temperatures begin to soar in the second half of April.

"We recognise that under peacetime operating conditions, rising temperatures mean that sooner or later we will have to withdraw the carrier," a Ministry of Defence spokesman admitted yesterday.

When Illustrious leaves, Britain will still have six RAF Tornados, reconnaissance bombers in Saudi Arabia and eight more, specifically equipped for bombing missions against Iraq, at the Kuwaiti airbase of Ali Al Salem.

The obvious replacement for the GR7s would be an additional batch of Tornados in Kuwait. But a decision on whether to plug the gap has not yet been taken, according to the MoD spokesman.

Meanwhile HMS Invincible will be welcomed back to Portsmouth today after a seven-month unscheduled tour of duty that has taken her from the West Indies to the Gulf. In November, as the Iraqi crisis developed, she was ordered to stand by in the Mediterranean where RAF Harriers from Laarbruch, in Germany, joined her.

In January she went through the Suez Canal to join the US air and naval strike force gathering in the Gulf.

Water companies pose threat to wildlife

Paul Brown
Environment Correspondent

THE future of 80 of the most valuable wildlife sites in England and Wales threatened by privatisation water companies is to be decided by the Department of Environment.

The companies are either accused of destroying the Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) by over-abstraction of water or by killing the plants and wildlife with excess nutrients from sewage.

Yesterday at a conference to discuss their future organised by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, a plea for the 80 SSSIs was made by Barbara Young, the organisation's chief executive. She told Michael Meacher, the Environment Minister, that if action was not taken soon the sites would die. "They are like patients on a hospital waiting list — they cannot wait much longer without becoming mortuary cases."

The Government has to decide whether to insist the sites are saved when it sets consumers' water bills over the next five years. According to the Environment Agency, £220 million will have to be spent to restore the sites, out of a total of £4 billion total investment in the water industry. This money would be needed to find alternative water sources and improve sewage works that drain into rivers and marshes.

English Nature, the Government's nature adviser, and the Environment Agency joined together to say the cost, though high, was tiny compared with what consumers would be forced to pay to the companies over the period.

Ian Byatt, director general of Ofwat, the water price regulator, has come under fire for saying he had given priority cutting water bills at the expense of the environment. A better environment had to be balanced against costs, he said yesterday.

He had the duty to fix water prices, but it was up to ministers to decide what had to be paid for through water bills.

"Water bills are similar to taxes, they have to be set by government — they cannot be decided by an unelected regulator."

The environment lobby believes that rather than being cut, prices can be held steady for five years.

Geoff Mance, director of water management for the Environment Agency, said: "In the last five years the industry has coughed up £3 billion in windfall tax, spent £1 billion on share buy-backs and giving consumers discounts, and paid double-figure dividend payments. To them curing the ills of wildlife sites is peanuts."

Even Brian Duckworth, managing director of Severn Trent Water Company, insisted the companies could fix the wildlife sites without extra money. "During the last five years consumers have become much more aware of issues like global warming and many more are prepared to pay something towards protecting the environment," he said.

Survey shows more people claim they are disabled

David Brindle, Social Services Correspondent

AS MANY as four in 10 people in some parts of Britain consider they have a longstanding illness, and up to one in four says it limits their activity, an official survey today shows.

The number reporting a longstanding illness has risen 66 per cent since 1972, according to the General Household Survey. Separately, the number reporting a limiting acute illness has doubled.

The findings follow another survey, earlier this month, which sharply raised the Department of Social Security's estimate of the number of disabled adults. The two surveys cast fresh light on the rise in the bill for sickness and disability benefits. Ministers have said the rise cannot reflect a true increase in disability, but the surveys suggest — at least in terms of people's own estimation of their health.

Authors of the GHS, produced by the Office for National Statistics, say the rise in self-reported illness

"may reflect changes not only in the actual prevalence of sickness, but in the expectations people have."

The bill for sickness and disability benefits, now £24 billion a year, is one of the main issues in the Government's welfare spending review. Most commentators assume much of the money is going to people who are fit. But the DSS estimate has been revised, on the basis of the 1996/97 Family Resources Survey, from 5.8 million disabled adults living in private households to 8.6 million.

Today's GHS, based on a separate series of interviews with 17,000 people in 1996/97, shows that 35 per cent say they have a longstanding illness and 22 per cent say it limits their activity.

As many as 40 per cent of women in the North of England, and 38 per cent of men in Wales, report a longstanding illness. Up to 26 per cent of women in the North and South Wales, say it restricts their activity.

Living in Britain — 1996 General Household Survey, Stationery Office, £38.50.

'Intoxicating' Blair enthuses French

Jon Henley in Paris

"**B**RILLIANT", "intoxicating", "charismatic". On the day after Tony Blair's speech to the National Assembly, the French press wheeled out the superlatives. "He is young, quite the good-looking lad, with a twinkle in his eye and a boundless wit," declared the tabloid Le Parisien. "At the National Assembly, he was the star."

The left-leaning Liberation, while more serious, was equally enthusiastic. "In a 35-minute speech given in all but flawless French, the Prime Minister decoded the revolution he is spearheading in Britain more precisely than he has ever done before, delivering a veritable lesson in Blairism."

Even the sober Le Monde joined the fan club: Mr Blair's French was "perfect", his anecdotes left the

packed chamber "rolling in the aisles"; and, concluding that he "had them all, from left and right, firmly in his pocket".

So impressed were some French MPs that they called the Guardian to deliver their verdict.

"Quite brilliant," enthused Jack Lang, a former culture minister. "He completely seduced the assembly. His speech had heart, imagination, vision, wit, finesse and style. He is so sincere, so personally engaged — it was a breath of fresh air."

But few commentators failed to notice that Mr Blair's performance was, perhaps curiously, far better received on the right side of the house than on the left. "It is an understatement to say that Tony Blair went down a storm — but with the right," wrote Le Figaro.

"In less than 40 minutes,

the British prime minister won over an opposition that never even attempted to resist his charms." Virtually every MP from the conservative RPR party showed himself a "committed fan" of New Labour and the Third Way. It said.

The Socialist benches, on the other hand, appeared "long-faced and agitated. This was not, evidently, a form of socialism they recognised."

And the tone of some conservative parliamentarians may give Mr Blair cause to wonder about his message: "A delight," Pierre Le-louche told Liberation. "It was a salutary lesson in Thatcherism to both left and right."

Another Gaullist, Patrick Devedjian, went further. "Clearly, it's easy to make a mistake in English with the new New Labour," he told Le Monde. "It just means Conservative."

Ch. 11/15/98

World Cup confusion



The newly built 85,000-seat Stade de France in Saint Denis, northern Paris, which will host the opening game of the 1998 World Cup in June as well as the final in July

'If we have a security problem we'll check ID against tickets'

A campaign to prevent fans without valid tickets attending matches in France may be flawed. **John Duncan** reports

THE Government's £1 million advertising campaign to prevent ticketless fans from travelling to this summer's World Cup in France, may be based on misinformation.

The television adverts, first broadcast last night, feature a fan getting a black market ticket in France and being refused entry at a turnstile because the ticket bears the name of a French person. All French fans will have their names on their tickets.

The adverts highlight the fact that checks will weed out fans with black market tickets.

But a spokesman for the World Cup organisers said yesterday that tickets were unlikely to be checked routinely for matching names.

"If we have any doubts or a problem with security we will check identities against tickets," he said.

The Home Secretary, Jack Straw, denied that the adverts were based on an incorrect assumption. "We think it's true," he said. "We were led to believe they would be checked."

However, organisers admitted last February at a meeting with British police representatives in Paris that it would not be practical to check everyone entering the ground. They also say that only 37 per cent of the 2.5 million tickets will bear the name of the purchaser.

The Home Office adverts, to be broadcast on Sky, Channel 4 and Channel 5 until May, were also dismissed by supporters' groups. "It won't make a blind bit of difference," said Adam Brown of the

Football Supporters' Association. "We had names on tickets for Euro 96, and no one took any notice of them."

"Tickets were available from touts for a lot of the games, and the people on the turnstiles didn't bother to check people's identity. Previous experience is that tickets are available for tournaments and fans know that, which makes the Government's advertising campaign a bit of a waste of time."

The FSA's international officer, Alison Pilling, said the Government was preparing for the possibility of things going wrong. "They want to be able to wash their hands of it, if trouble happens, and say they told everyone not to go in the first place."

Last night a Home Office spokesman said that in Blackburn, Lancashire, this month the head of the security operation for France 98, Dominique Spinosi, spelled out plans for a system of checkpoints requiring fans to show tickets three times before getting to their seats.

"Even if you get past one cordon, with three stages of security anyone with an invalid ticket will soon come a cropper," he said.

Mr Straw also expressed government concern about plans to show matches live on big screens in the towns where they are being played as they would be "a magnet for people without tickets".

His French counterpart, Jean-Pierre Chevenement, has assured him there will be good crowd control due to fencing around the zones designated for the live screenings.



A football fan (above) has his ticket checked at the turnstiles and (below) a dud ticket

Switzerland bars entry to 19 English football hooligans

NINETEEN known football hooligans were prevented from entering Switzerland to attend England's World Cup warm-up last night in an intelligence operation involving British and Swiss police, *writes John Duncan.*

Fourteen were informed by British police at Luton airport that Swiss authorities had decided not to let them. The group left the plane and are believed to have attempted to travel via another airport where they were also informed that they would not be admitted.

The other five, who travelled on an earlier flight, were stopped in Geneva and sent home. One of them was involved in an incident on the plane in which a hostess complained of being "touched", an airline spokesman said. No charge was brought.

Immigration officials now check passenger lists against an international database of football hooligans. The Football Intelligence Unit offers to provide foreign police with spotters who know the Category C hooligans — the 200 or so worst thugs.

FACT:
ALL TICKETS SOLD
TO FRENCH RESIDENTS
WILL HAVE
THEIR NAMES ON.

Appeal win casts doubt on Scots convictions

Lawrence Donegan

A SUCCESSFUL appeal by a man convicted of handling stolen goods has cast doubt on thousands of convictions by Scottish courts dating back 17 years.

Ian Hancock, who was fined £750 two years ago, yesterday became the first person to win an appeal based on a judgment handed down earlier this month which outlawed certain types of pre-trial hearings — called "secondary intermediate diets" — in sheriff courts.

The Crown Office in Scotland confirmed last night that it was reviewing 1,000 cases that were before the courts, and that many of them might have to be "started afresh" because of a ruling by one of Scotland's most senior judges, Lord Cullen.

The Scottish Office is also examining the possibility of retrospective legislation to close the loophole.

But Paul Lynch, Mr Hancock's solicitor, said his client's case could also affect thousands of prosecutions dating back to 1981.

"No doubt defence solicitors up and down the country will look at this case and then consult their clients with a view to making compensation claims for wrongful conviction and detention," he said.

Intermediate hearings were introduced in 1981 to save costs and reduce the chance of witnesses attending court to no purpose. Thousands of defendants accused of "summary offences" every year — including drink driving, assault and minor drugs charges — undergo at least two pre-trial hearings.

However, Lord Cullen ruled earlier this month that an accused person should only face only one intermediate hearing. There was no basis in Scots law for "secondary diets", he said, and any trial preceded by two such court hearings could be ruled "incompetent".

The Solicitor General for Scotland, Colin Boyd QC, did

not contest Mr Hancock's appeal after his counsel argued in the Appeal Court in Edinburgh that his 1986 conviction should be quashed because he had undergone two pre-trial hearings.

A Crown Office spokesman said there was no way of knowing exactly how many past cases could be affected, but it would be up to the defence solicitors in such cases to approach the appeal court.

"We would expect that in most of these cases there will have been a defence solicitor and we would expect these solicitors will bring the cases to the attention of the appeal court," a spokesman said.

Legal sources blamed the problem on badly drafted legislation, but said the potential problem had been "overlooked" for years.

Last night the Scottish Office said it was considering retrospective legislation.

"Our view is that any such legislation would be dealing with a technical change to the law and a change in procedure, rather than any actual change to the law that a person was convicted under," a spokesman said.

An Edinburgh solicitor, Alistair Duff, a member of the Law Society of Scotland's council, dismissed suggestions that Lord Cullen's ruling would result in chaos in the Scottish courts.

"This does appear to be something of a glitch within the system. What the Law Society hopes is that the Government will act quickly to restore the situation where secondary hearings can take place and be legal," said Mr Duff.

Mr Hancock, aged 44, of Paisley, welcomed the appeal court's ruling but claimed he was innocent in any case and therefore he was disappointed at being denied the opportunity to challenge his conviction.

"I have said all along that I was the victim of a miscarriage of justice. I have been denied the opportunity to put my case because of a legal technicality," he said.

Murder suspect 'kidnapped girl'

A MAN accused of murdering a judge's daughter after subjected a teenage girl to a terrifying 100-mile drive less than 12 hours after the alleged killing, a court heard yesterday.

Debbie Van Gerko, a student and part-time shop assistant, was also tied up and locked in the boot of her car during the ordeal, which lasted almost 11 hours, on April 26 last year. She feared for her life and was frightened she would be raped, Liverpool crown court heard.

It was the morning after Nicholas Burton, aged 28, allegedly attacked judge's daughter Rachel McGrath, aged 27, with a knife, leaving her dying in a pool of blood outside a pub in Stockport, Greater Manchester.

In a statement read out in court yesterday, Miss Van Gerko, now 18, said she first encountered unemployed Burton when she stopped to buy cigarettes near her home in Gatley, near Stockport. Burton, of New Mills, Derbyshire, pleaded not guilty to murdering Miss McGrath, of Wilmslow, Cheshire, and kidnapping Miss Van Gerko, falsely imprisoning her and threatening to kill her.

The jury has been told that Burton admitted the acts, but his defence would call evidence that he was insane at the time or suffering from an

abnormality of mind that diminished his responsibility.

Miss Van Gerko said: "I had nearly reached my car and as I turned round I saw the man [Burton] walking towards me. He said very quietly 'Give me all your money and get in the car, please'."

He was holding a knife towards her. They drove off with her at the wheel and eventually joined the A55 road to north Wales. She felt "nervous" but tried to make conversation with Burton.

As they approached Conwy, Burton grew concerned that the car was running low on petrol. He tied her up in the boot and went to buy some, then released her and ordered her to drive to a spot in Snowdonia where they halted for 3½ hours.

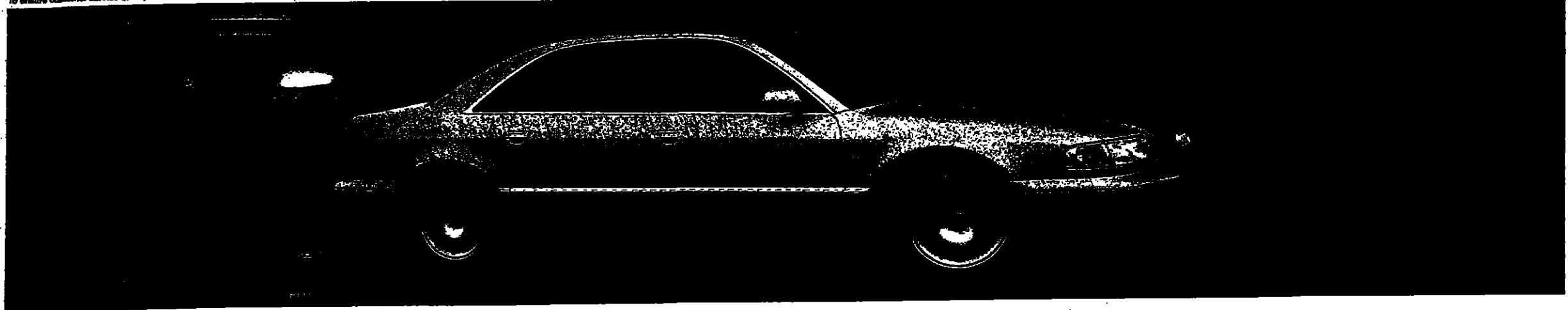
Miss Van Gerko said Burton then drove the car to a bank and told her to use her cash card to get money. They then went to a garage in Caernarvon, with Burton driving, where he filled the tank with petrol.

"I saw a taxi right next to us. Very, very slowly I moved my hand toward my seat belt. I opened the car door and ran to the taxi driver." She threw herself out to his lap.

Burton drove away in her car, she said, but was arrested by police the next day.

The trial continues today.

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6 WORLD NEWS

The summit is a sign Europe need not follow US foreign policy, writes James Meek in Moscow

Yeltsin hosts Kohl, Chirac

HELMUT KOHL and Jacques Chirac became the first western leaders to meet Russian President Boris Yeltsin last night when they arrived in Moscow for a three-day European summit with President Yeltsin in which Britain is conspicuous by its absence.

Tony Blair was not invited to take part in the meeting — which is to discuss Iraq, Kosovo and European security — when it was arranged by the French and Russian presidents in Strasbourg last October, indicating that Moscow, at least, considers Britain too pro-American to be included.

The Kremlin, backed by Paris, wants the "troika" summit to be held regularly as a sign that Europe need not

follow the US in foreign policy and security. Mr Yeltsin's spokesman and foreign affairs co-ordinator, Sergei Yastrzhembsky, declared: "The new political reality in Europe will begin to work."

The troika summit has irritated Britain, which holds the rotating EU presidency, and embarrassed Germany.

"This wasn't a German initiative. The Germans were pulled into it in Strasbourg by France and the Russians. Bonn just couldn't say no," said Christiane Hoffmann of the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung.

There was consternation in the Foreign Office in October when, after Mr Blair and Mr Kohl had left a human rights summit in Strasbourg, Mr Yeltsin and Mr Chirac announced the troika plan.

Britain's subsequent stance on the Iraqi crisis seemed to

Moscow to confirm that its foreign and defence policy was an annex of US policy.

There is some evidence that Russia's foreign policy experts are themselves embarrassed by the latest example of what appears to be a parallel overseas policy pursued by the capricious Mr Yeltsin.

Britain does not regard the troika summit as a snub. 'We don't plan to try to get into this triumvirate'

It is understood Russian officials have assured their British counterparts that the troika is more a gathering of old friends than a dramatic foreign policy initiative.

"We don't regard it in any way as a snub," a British embassy spokesman said. "We're

not planning to try to get into this triumvirate. There are other ways we can develop our relations with Russia, such as through the G8 and the EU presidency."

The next summit of the Group of Eight, the seven major industrialised democracies plus Russia, is to be held

in Birmingham in May. Russian foreign policy commentator Vladimir Abarinov said Moscow was being encouraged by Paris to see Europe as a geographical idea, rather than a cultural one in which Western Europe and the US had much in common.

"In the Kremlin, in the Russian foreign ministry, it's a tradition to think that there's Europe and then there's America," he said.

The Kremlin's rating of Blair is closely tied to the Kremlin's rating of Clinton since as far as Moscow is concerned Britain's policies are led by the United States. And there are fixed factors of age, education and upbringing...

Much of the symbolism of the troika meeting has been lost since the venue was moved from Yekaterinburg in the Urals to Moscow because of Mr Yeltsin's recent illness. Mr Yeltsin's dismissal of the entire government is likely to dominate the agenda.

One of the highlights of the original plan was a trip by the three leaders to the monument in the Urals marking

the symbolic dividing line between Asia and Europe. Instead the French president and German chancellor will be exploring the division between the older and younger generations of Russian rulers marked by Mr Yeltsin and Mr Khrushchev.

The acting prime minister, who is expected to announce his cabinet next week, met Communist leader Gennady Zyuganov yesterday, one of the parliamentary leaders whose support will be important if the Duma is to approve his candidacy.

A reminder of the economic crisis behind Russia's political turmoil came yesterday with a warning from a senior Kremlin official that the 1998 budget, already pruned before being passed on March 12, would need to be cut again if the government was to have any hope of paying its bills.

Calls for civil war apology split clergy

Adela Gooch in Madrid

A SUGGESTION that Spain's bishops acknowledge the sins of the past and ask forgiveness for the Catholic Church's support of General Francisco Franco's 40-year dictatorship has split the clergy.

Opponents of an apology, while acknowledging that the Church turned a blind eye to Franco's purges during the civil war of 1936-39, remain angry that hundreds of nuns and priests suffered in the run-up to the war at the hands of left-wing extremists.

The debate has pitted the country's top two clerics against each other. Cardinal Antonio María Rouco Varela, Archbishop of Madrid, argues that the Church's recent history of political impartiality, following the death of

backed the plan. "If Spanish bishops don't ask forgiveness now, they run the risk of the Church doing so over their heads, as happened in the case of Germany," said an El País editorial.

The proposal's advocates argue that next year's anniversary of the end of the civil war would be a particularly appropriate time for the Church to express regret for collaborating with Franco.

Following the Vatican's publication of a document on the Nazi Holocaust last week, Bishop Carreras is also pushing for an apology to cover the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 by Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand. "I do not condemn the lady but I don't think she should be canonised either," he said, referring to a campaign to make the queen a saint.

A Church apology would follow in the wake of apologetic gestures made by the Spanish state. In 1992, the 500th anniversary of the expulsion of the Jews, King Juan Carlos acknowledged it had been "a mistake" which deprived Spain of rich cultures and a tradition of religious tolerance. This year the conservative government agreed to compensate the losers in the civil war and passed a decree to restore property and bank accounts to political parties, trade unions and militia groups.

But many clergymen feel that any such gesture would be a betrayal. "They have not forgotten the attacks by the extremists who sacked monasteries and convents, burnt churches and killed clerics," said the bishop of Granada, Antonio Cañizares.

Cardinal Carreras' proposal for a gesture of reconciliation is said to have found favour with the Vatican even though, up to now, the Pope has not shown any inclination to condemn clerics associated with Franco, while canonising victims of the anti-clerical purges of the 1930s. The Vatican has suggested waiting until 2000 and linking the reconciliation statement to a special holy year at the shrine of St James in Santiago de Compostela, rather than to the more politically sensitive civil war anniversary.

Meciar denies plan to take presidency

Kate Connolly in Bratislava

SLOVAKIA'S prime minister Vladimir Meciar announced yesterday that he does not intend to stand for the presidency, dismissing repeated opposition claims that he covets the job.

Slovakia has been without a president for almost a month, since Michal Kovac's five-year term in office expired. Since then parliament has failed on four occasions to elect a replacement.

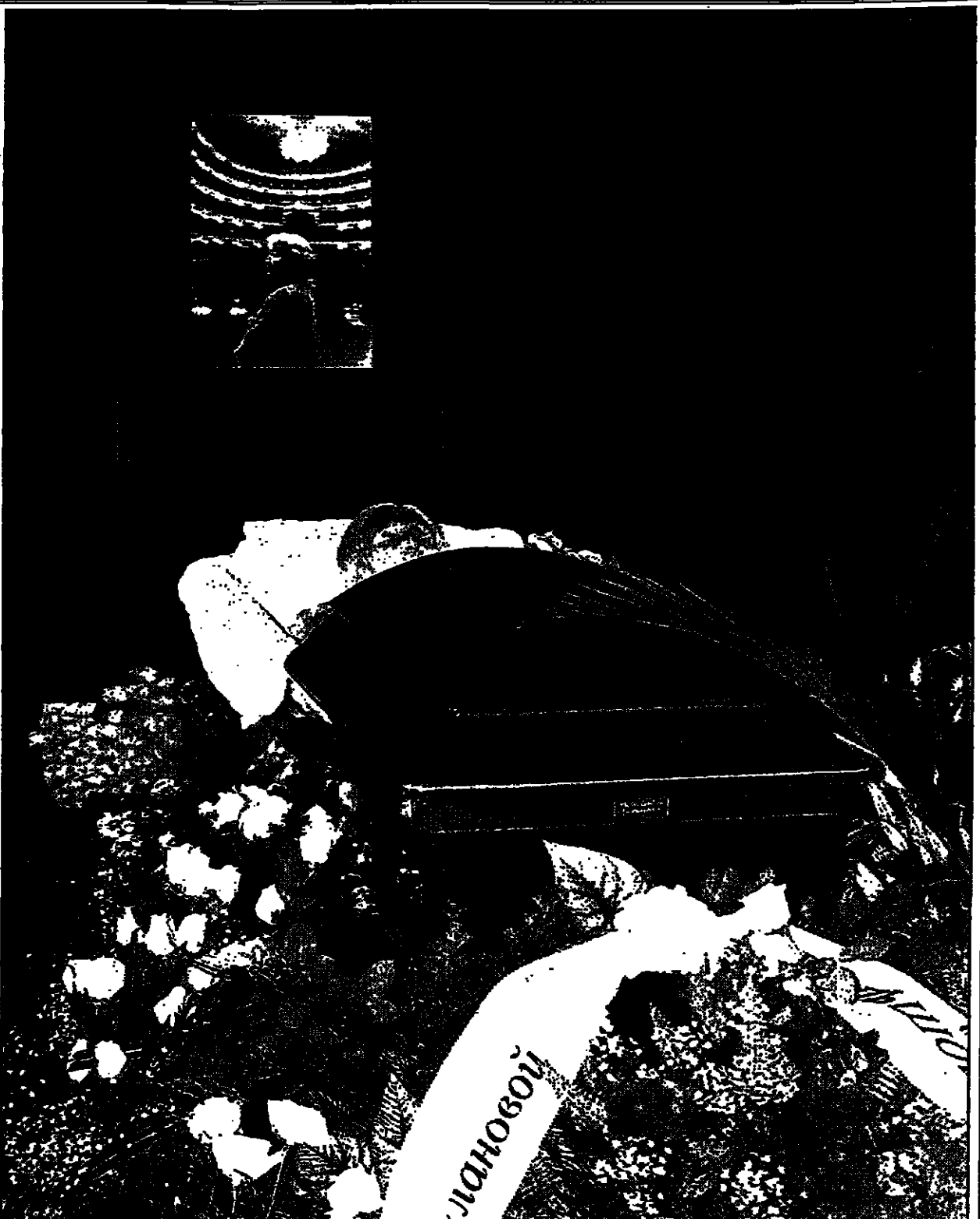
Mr Meciar has assumed many presidential powers since Mr Kovac left and has been accused of engineering the crisis for his own gain. He has been criticised by both the European Union and the United States for backsliding on democracy and becoming increasingly autocratic.

Yesterday he stressed that he had "no intention of running for president".

Answering critics who have attacked him for increasingly orientating his policies towards Russia, he said it was an important part of the country's overall foreign policy.

The press conference was seen as a damage limitation exercise to appease the West — particularly NATO and the EU. "I'm aware of the current waves of criticism... The conclusions [reached] do not reflect the real situation," Mr Meciar insisted. Opposition members dismissed the press conference as a slick performance and said Mr Meciar was not to be trusted.

The interpreter addressed him as "Mr President" at one point, before swiftly correcting himself. Mr Meciar chuckled along with his audience.



The body of Galina Ulanova, the decorated Russian ballerina who died at the weekend, aged 88, lies at the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow yesterday so that Russians could pay their last respects

PHOTOGRAPH: OLEG NIKOSHIN

Papon trial in doubt as wife dies

Paul Webster in Paris

CONTINUATION of the trial of Maurice Papon for crimes against humanity was in doubt yesterday as the former Vichy official left Bordeaux after hearing that his wife of 55 years, Paulette, had died.

Prosecution lawyers did not oppose a request by the defence to adjourn the hearing until Monday while Mr Papon, aged 87, attended the funeral of his wife, who was 88. But Michel Zaoui, representing some of the families of deported Jews, said he feared

that the trial would have to be adjourned *since die* because Mr Papon might be affected physically by the news.

Mr Papon left for his home near Paris soon after being told of the death by his three children. His lawyer, Francis Vuillemin, said the shock was terrible and that Mr Papon had reacted with despair.

The adjournment was the latest unexpected event in a trial which was due to end before Christmas but has now lasted nearly six months, making it France's longest post-war hearing.

It has been previously interrupted by Mr Papon's

heart condition and procedural questions.

Although Mr Zaoui said he had been assured that Mr Papon would return to court to proclaim his innocence of charges of an administrative role in the deportation of 1,500 Jews murdered in Germany, other prosecution lawyers said they doubted that he would. They privately expressed fears that even if he were able to attend, the jury would be sympathetic to appeals by the defence to acquit him. His chief lawyer, Jean-Marc Varaut, had started what was to be a three-day plea when the case was ad-

judged. He had told the court Mr Papon was being used as a scapegoat for crimes of the collaborationist Vichy regime.

Mr Papon, who was responsible for Jewish affairs in wartime Bordeaux, had intended to give his version of events tomorrow, and a verdict was expected by the end of the day. No verdict is likely now before Thursday next week.

Although some prosecution barristers have demanded life imprisonment, state advocates have advised the jury, which decides the length of sentences, to call for 20 years in jail.

West Germans spied for the Stasi

AP in Berlin

BETWEEN 20,000 and 30,000 West Germans helped East Germany's secret police for decades, spying for the communists and trying to influence Western politics, a government agency said this week.

The group, headed by German clergyman Joachim Gauck, is searching through mountains of Stasi files that became available after communist East Germany merged with West Germany in 1990.

The Stasi not only under- took military and industrial espionage against the West, but invested enormous energy in securing spies to sabotage West German public opinion and decision-making, Mr Gauck said.

The Stasi also sought to recruit volunteers to help attack West German security forces in the event of a war with the East, he said.

"It was an attack on democracy," Mr Gauck said. "With the help of unofficial agents and through active measures, the institutions, parties and general society of the Federal Republic of Germany were influenced."

Much of the agency's focus

so far has been on the estimated 174,000 East Germans believed to have worked as Stasi informants.

The agency's findings have hampered or ruined the political careers of some prominent former East Germans, prompting criticism that it was being used as a western German tool.

Mr Gauck said the new study shows that the Stasi was a "general German" institution, operating on both sides of the Iron Curtain. In West Berlin alone, 1,300 people spied for the Stasi, he said.

The Stasi tried to prevent

the conservative Christian Democratic Union — the party of Chancellor Helmut Kohl — from gaining power in the early 1970s, he said.

He added that it later exerted much of its effort in spying on Green Party members who had contacts to East German dissidents.

● The Social Democrat candidate for chancellor, Gerhard Schröder, said yesterday the Greens should stop talking "nonsense" if they want to be part of a future government. He said the party made too many unpopular demands, including disbanding NATO and tripling petrol prices.

World news in brief

Turkish court frees leftwing students

IN ONE of Turkey's most widely watched trials, a court yesterday ordered the release of five students who have spent three years in jail for belonging to an outlawed leftwing group. The case in Izmir has been seen as a test of human rights in a country criticised for being too harsh on political expression and too soft on human rights violations by security forces.

The students were serving sentences ranging from five to 12 and a half years. Police officers charged with torturing them in custody were acquitted two weeks ago.

An appeals court in January overturned the students' convictions and ordered a retrial, saying they should have been charged with aiding and abetting an illegal organisation, which carries a sentence of three years. Because the students have already served three years, the court decided to set them free while their trial continues. — AP, Izmir.

Millon defiant on NF pact

THE French right seemed headed for further convulsions yesterday after a leading regional council chairman, one of five elected last week with the help of votes from the far-right National Front, said he had no intention of resigning despite the threat of expulsion from his party.

"I am being painted as a traitor, but I believe I am doing my country a service," Charles Millon, a former defence minister and the newly-elected UDF chairman of the Rhone-Alpes council, wrote in Le Figaro newspaper.

The UDF party, which with the Gaullist RPR forms France's conservative opposition, said the five rebel council chairmen, who ignored party instructions and accepted National Front support to hold on to power, would be expelled if they did not resign within a week. — Jon Henley, Paris.

Mugabe fury at UK 'smeared'

ZIMBABWE'S President Robert Mugabe, enraged by what he described as a smear campaign against him, denied he was buying a castle in Scotland and accused Britain of trying to derail his government's programme to seize farms owned by descendants of white British settlers.

Mr Mugabe issued a statement challenging the British government to find any property he owned in Britain, sell it and give the money to charity, the state-controlled Herald newspaper reported yesterday. Britain's Sunday Times newspaper had alleged that Mr Mugabe had failed in a bid to buy one property in the Scottish Highlands and was considering other properties costing up to \$5.5 million. — AP, Harare.

Mexican satanists jailed

THREE Mexican satanists were each sentenced to 50 years in prison on Tuesday for the murder of 15 people in devil-worshipping rituals nine years ago, officials said.

The group had become known as "narco-satanists" because of reports that it sought the devil's protection for a marijuana dealing operation by sacrificing people and animals.

They were part of a clan, based just across the border from Texas, responsible for the deaths of 15 people, including a nine-year-old Mexican child and a US student. — Reuters, Mexico City.

And then there were five

THERE are five Great Lakes, not six, the United States Senate has conceded, undoing a recent vote that flew in the face of what every American schoolchild knows.

Senator Patrick Leahy, who engineered the earlier promotion of Lake Champlain by slipping a sentence into other legislation, went along with the change since it left intact his original aim of helping the University of Vermont win maritime grants.

He underestimated the controversy that erupted after President Clinton signed it into law on March 6. The issue has been front-page news in Great Lakes states for weeks. Champlain, a 490 square mile lake that straddles Vermont and New York, is puny in size compared with the Great Lakes, the smallest of which, Ontario, is 7,430 square miles. — AP, Washington.

President pardons lesbian

A WOMAN jailed in Romania for two years for making a pass at another woman was released yesterday after receiving a presidential pardon. Mariana Cetinar, aged 41, was convicted in 1996 of "tempting a woman for having sexual relations" and sentenced to three years in prison. She was included in a group of pardons signed by President Emil Constantinescu.

The Romanian Helsinki Committee for Human Rights reported in January that 57 people were in Romanian jails for violating the law against homosexuality. Ms Cetinar, the only woman, said she intends to leave Romania. — AP, Bucharest.

Panic fuel buying in Lagos

THE streets were jammed in Nigeria's commercial capital, Lagos, yesterday as motorists scrambled to buy newly arrived petrol after a week-long shortage paralysed business in Africa's biggest oil producer.

Queues of cars stretched outside the few filling stations with fuel to sell after authorities brought in 17 million litres of petrol. Paramilitary police with horsewhips kept desperate customers in check. Hundreds more were on standby to intervene if there was any repeat of violence that erupted on Monday, when unruly crowds were dispersed with tear gas. — Reuters, Lagos.

No chance to meet the maker

THERE was disappointment yesterday for a 150-member Taiwanese spiritual sect which recently moved to the Dallas suburb of Garland after predicting God would appear on television immediately after midnight to announce that he would descend to earth next week.

There was no sign of the heavenly television broadcast that sect leader Hon-Ming Chen had predicted would be visible on Channel 18 on any television set in the United States. A contrite Mr Chen said his prediction that God would turn up at 10am next Tuesday has not been realised, you can take what we have preached as nonsense," he said through an interpreter. "I would rather you don't believe what I say any more." — Reuters, Garland.

Indians seek cyclone victims



Residents walk past the devastated site of Danton village in West Bengal in India yesterday. The area was hit by a cyclone on Tuesday, killing at least 145 people. As many as 500 people are still missing

PHOTOGRAPH: BIRAS DAS

When the faeces hit the fan

A SRI Lankan charged with theft threw a plastic bag filled with human faeces at policemen, but it hit a fan and showered the entire court, court officials said yesterday.

They said Subhashinghe Premasiri, who had been charged with stealing gas cookers and cyclinders, had taken the bag out of his pocket and thrown it at policemen when he was asked to step into the witness box. "The bag struck a fan, got entangled and the entire court was showered with excreta." — Reuters, Colombo.

Milosevic off the hook again

Big powers backpedal on Kosovo deadline

Ian Traynor in Bonn

INTERNATIONAL powers yesterday backed away from their threats of immediate punishment for Yugoslavia's President Slobodan Milosevic over his policies of violence and repression in Kosovo and gave the Serbian strongman four more weeks to deliver concessions. The foreign ministers of the United States, Russia, Britain, Germany, France and Italy, meeting in Bonn to ponder their options on the southern Balkan crisis, pledged to work for a United Nations arms embargo resolution on Yugoslavia by next week unless Belgrade opened an "unconditional dialogue" with Kosovo's majority Albanians on the Serbian province's political status.

Robin Cook, the Foreign Secretary, said Yugoslav sets abroad would be frozen in four weeks unless Mr Milosevic agreed to talks. The six-country contact group also insisted that the European Union envoy, Felipe Gonzalez, take part in negotiations.

Mr Milosevic, whose regime has operated a police state in Kosovo for eight years, rejects demands for mediation, insisting the crisis is an internal matter.

US officials said they were eager to get the arms embargo in place because Russia had struck a deal with Mr Milosevic for supplies of fighter aircraft, attack helicopters, missiles and tanks.

German officials said there had been no discussion of a Russian-Yugoslav arms agreement (reportedly initiated in December), but that such a deal would not be illegal.

Madeleine Albright, the US secretary of state, said any new arms embargo could not be retroactive. It was not

clear if the ban would apply to the Russian agreement.

At the beginning of March, the six powers gave Mr Milosevic 10 days to yield to a list of demands on Kosovo or face further sanctions. That deadline expired and was reset for yesterday.

"I will not pretend that the contact group members agreed on everything today," Mrs Albright said.

European officials said that they had laboured through the night with the Americans and agreed on a much tougher stance towards Mr Milosevic, but that Russia had rejected it.

Yevgeny Primakov, the Russian foreign minister, criticised Albanian secessionism, saying that yesterday's meeting had received a letter from the Kosovo Albanian leader, Ibrahim Rugova, headed "President of the Kosovo Republic".

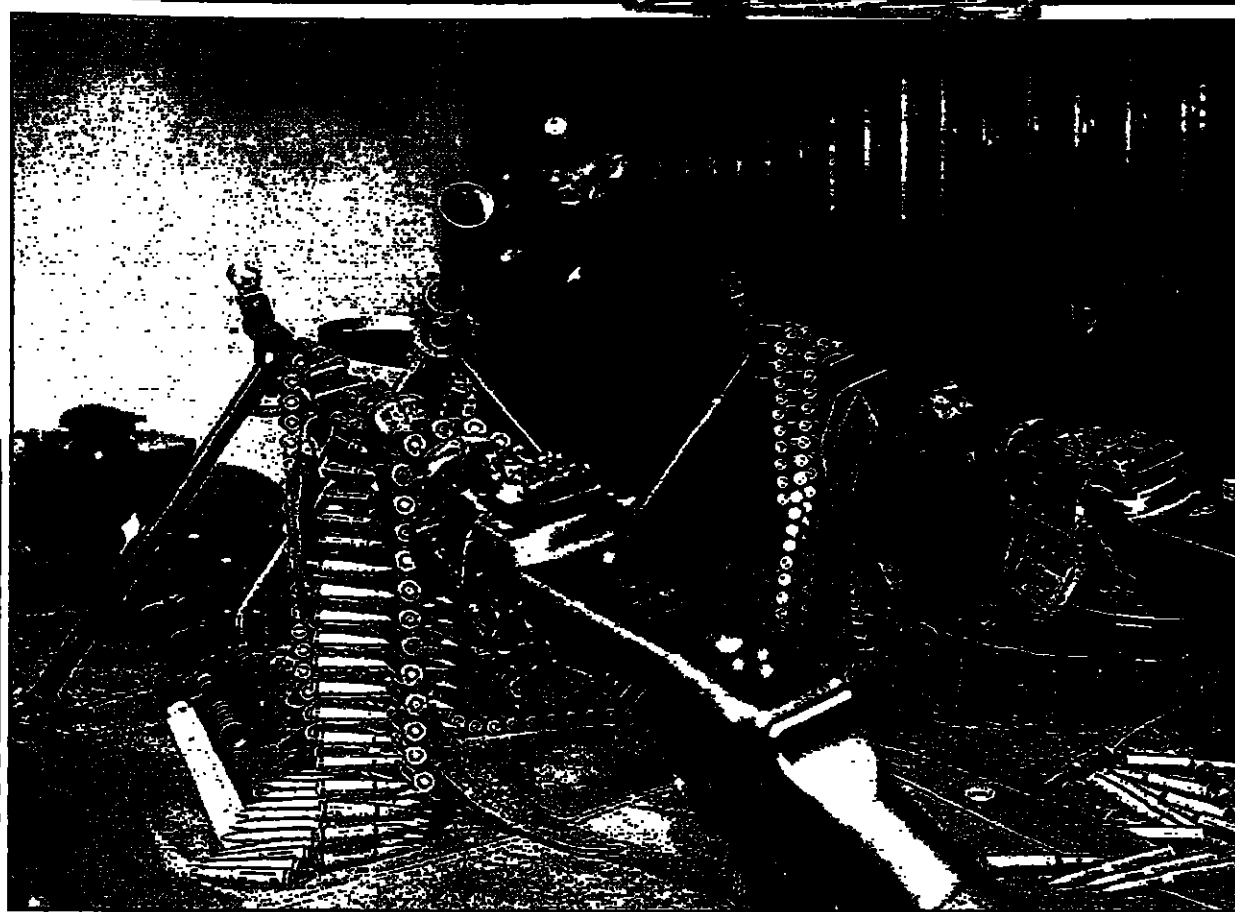
"That has to be avoided," Mr Primakov said. All the powers oppose Albanian separatist claims, urging instead a form of home rule for Kosovo within Yugoslavia.

That stance was supported yesterday by Albania, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Greece, Turkey and Romania.

In the past few weeks Serbian paramilitary police units backed by tanks and helicopter gunships have killed about 100 Kosovo Albanians and torched their homes.

Mr Milosevic is highly skilled at exploiting the divisions among the international players and will use his new breathing space to stall.

Men returned cautiously to their homes in Glodjane yesterday after clashes between Serbian police and Kosovo Albanian separatists. Police said Tuesday's clashes left one policeman and two Albanians dead, and three policemen badly injured.



A Serbian policeman in Pristina stands behind a display of weapons reportedly seized from ethnic Albanians during Tuesday's clashes in the Kosovo village of Glodjane. Serbia said two Albanians and one policeman were killed

British lead the push for strong genocide court

Mark Tran in New York

HUMAN rights groups praised Britain yesterday for its "very creative approach" in the final planning session on the creation of a permanent international criminal court to deal with genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. Some of the thorniest issues will probably not be resolved until June, when all 185 United Nations members meet in Rome to adopt a convention that will establish a permanent tribunal. The points of contention cover the power of an independent prosecutor, the relationship between the Security Council and the court and the disclosure of sensitive national security information.

Under the Labour government, the British delegation has come out more strongly in favour of a strong, effective international court, putting it at odds with the US and the other permanent council members. In the current session at the UN, Britain has won plaudits for its sugges-

tions of ways to reconcile security concerns with the authority of the court.

"The UK has adopted a very creative approach on this issue," said Richard Dicker of Human Rights Watch. "Britain is head and shoulders above the Americans here and we hope it rises to the occasion and takes the right position on issues."

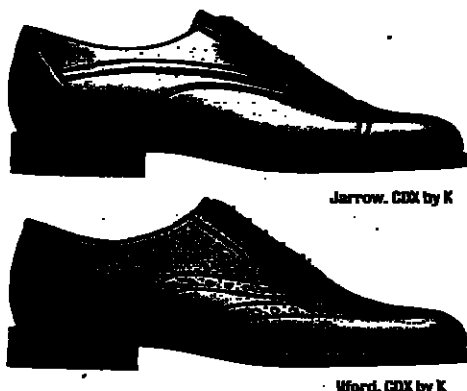
Britain is circulating a paper that says the court "should be able to make the final determination in respect of disclosure", while giving full weight to the national security concerns of states.

It calls for procedures to ensure that national security claims are mounted only as a last resort after all appropriate steps have been taken to disclose information or documents in a way that does not pose unacceptable risks to national security. If a state were able to demonstrate that information should not be handed over because it would prejudice such interests, the British paper says the court should have the power to set aside such a claim only in exceptional circumstances.

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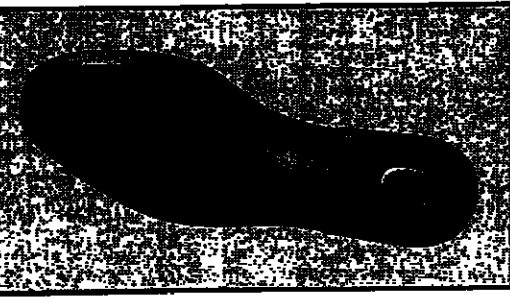
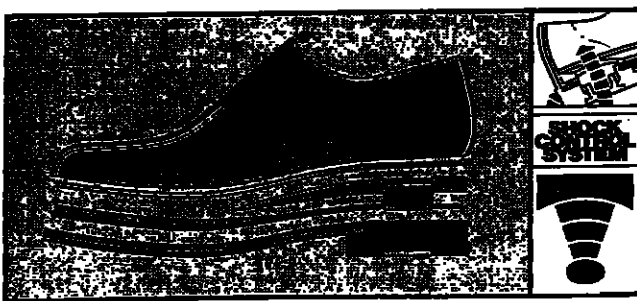
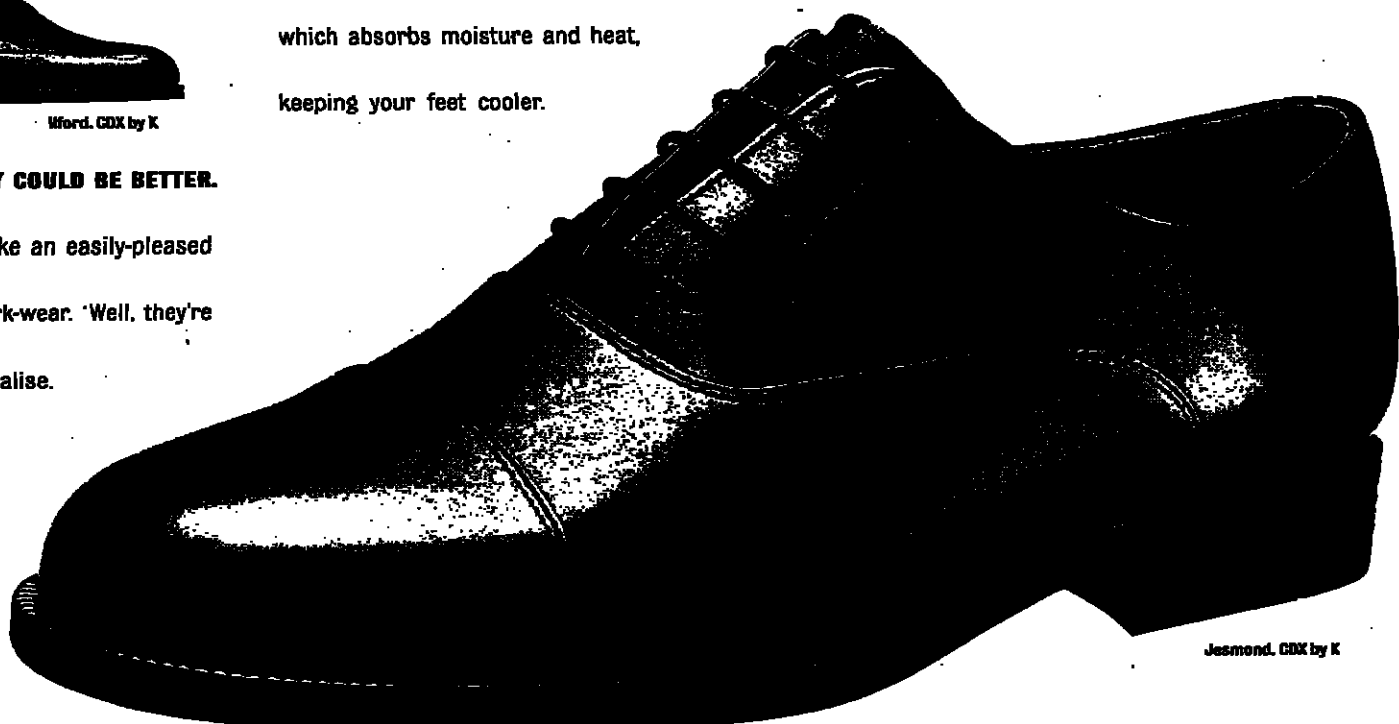
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CIA accused of bungling Iraq escape

Julian Borger Middle East Correspondent

NASSIR al-Hindawi, the founder of Iraq's germ warfare programme, was seized by Saddam Hussein's secret police after the CIA bungled an attempt to smuggle the elderly scientist out of the country, Iraqi opposition sources said yesterday.

The Iraqi government announced yesterday that UN weapons inspectors would be permitted to interview Mr Hindawi, a 70-year-old biologist who is accused of trying to leave on a forged passport.

But a spokesman for the UN Special Commission (Unscoc) said Mr Hindawi had already been interviewed on several occasions - the last time more than a year ago - and there were no immediate plans to talk to him again.

A senior member of the Iraqi opposition, speaking from western Europe, said the CIA had organised an escape route for Mr Hindawi to a rebel-controlled region in the north.

"He was supposed to have been smuggled across to Turkey," the official said. "But the reception committee waiting for him in the north had to come back empty-handed."

He said the defection plan had been ruined when the CIA informed a rebel faction, which leaked the information before the plan had been set in motion.

"People couldn't keep their mouth shut. They behaved in a naive manner," the official said.

Iraq's main exiled opposition group, the Iraqi National Congress, is at loggerheads with the Iraqi National Accord, said to have been in contact with

the CIA over the abortive defection.

In a letter to Unscoc announcing the arrest, Iraq's oil minister, Lieutenant-General Amir Muhammad Rasheed, included more than 200 pages of documents on Iraq's germ warfare programme which he said had been in Mr Hindawi's possession. The Iraqi opposition source said he believed the documents Mr Hindawi had intended to take with him had been confiscated, and unimportant papers offered up in their place.

Ewen Buchanan, Unscoc's spokesman in New York, said the documents and so far told the weapons inspectors little that was new. "Ninety per cent of the documents we have already seen - the rest are under investigation."

He said Mr Hindawi had been involved in the early stages of Iraq's biological weapon programme, and so was not a priority for Unscoc's investigations. Iraq says it wound up the programme in 1991, but Unscoc insists there is evidence Baghdad has concealed significant quantities of anthrax, botulin and aflatoxin, as well as chemical nerve agents. Unscoc was told Mr Hindawi had retired in 1989.

But Mr Buchanan acknowledged: "He would probably be able to tell us a lot more than he has if he wasn't being watched from all sides."

He said he could not rule out the possibility that UN weapons inspectors might want to interview Mr Hindawi again, but for the time being Unscoc would be able to do little for him.

"People are asking what are we doing to get him released and the answer is we can do nothing. If he has indeed broken Iraqi law it is not for the UN to get involved."

Unscoc's chairman, Richard Butler, is due to leave Iraq today after a round of talks with Iraqi officials. He has said he has made progress but added that Baghdad has yet to produce strong evidence that it has destroyed all of its biological weapons.

Unscoc inspections of Saddam's palaces are due to begin in the next few days.

Clinton aims at trade

Africa's poor need action

TO TAKE HEED of Africa, as Bill Clinton is now doing on his symbolic tour, is worth doing, however much cynicism it will invite along the way. It may be overdue and selective but it breaks a pattern of neglect and subordination to other aims. His contribution over slavery and US cold war policies may fall short of full apology but it would never have crossed the lips of recent US presidents. The image of a "new African renaissance", borrowed from South Africa's deputy president, Thabo Mbeki, may sound patronising, but not if it encourages a real renaissance — or rather first time birth — of western commitment to the neglected continent.

The slender basis of this new interest was, it is true, illustrated yesterday by Mr Clinton's naive behaviour on his brief flit (one could hardly call it a visit) in and out of Kigali airport. To tell an invited audience that he, the president of the US, had failed to "fully appreciate" what was happening in 1994 is little comfort now. It was perfectly clear from day one what was going on in Rwanda: the US failure to back prompt intervention was based not on lack of knowledge but on stubborn opposition to UN-sponsored peacekeeping after Washington's own debacle in Somalia. Mr Clinton's failure to lay a wreath at a memorial to the genocide, hurriedly erected outside the terminal building, is even more shame-making. If "time constraints and security" — the official White House explanation — did not allow it, then more time should have

been allowed, while security is a pathetic excuse. The object of his visit was said to be to "send a message that genocide is not acceptable and cannot go unpunished". But its perfunctory nature did nothing to strengthen the case. Indeed it may actually weaken the psychological impact of the financial aid given by the US to strengthen the Rwandan justice system.

Mr Clinton's reflections on slavery were sufficiently critical to cause some concern among his entourage who feared it would rekindle the domestic US argument over whether or not the government should apologise to the descendants of black American slaves. The view of Jesse Jackson, the president's special envoy to Africa, is more to the point. The question is not just one of history: it is how to move "from paternalism to partnership". During the cold war, western disregard of African sensitivities took a new form in encouraging surrogate paternalism of the particularly brutal kind brought to a peak by General Mobutu of Zaire and Angola's sinister Jonas Savimbi. Partnership now is not just a matter of patronising leaders such as Uganda's Yoweri Museveni or Nelson Mandela and his successors in South Africa. Countries which have sorted themselves out largely by their own efforts do not have cause to feel particularly grateful to the west. Nor is it a matter of praising "the new face of Africa" while trying to ignore those areas which fall a long way behind. What counts is where the relationship goes from here on as Africa joins the globalised economy.

Mr Clinton's aid package for Africa includes some important items on health, education and improved food security. But the main thrust of US policy is a new emphasis on trade and investment. This carries with it mixed benefits — implied in the title of the Africa Growth and Opportu-

nity Act which the House of Representatives approved this month. Growth for Africa and opportunity for foreign business is the new partnership paradigm. Strong regimes like that of Mr Museveni will hold their own in such an arrangement: others may get the worst of the bargain: for them the familiar problems of oppression, debt and poverty still have to be tackled.

Free the PO

It could be a world force

NEW LABOUR'S next virility test is what to do with the Post Office, one of the very few public bodies to have escaped privatisation by the Conservatives. The PO is awaiting the outcome of a review into ways of giving it the commercial freedom it craves. The wonder of it is that it is still there at all. People were writing it off with the invention of the telephone and then the fax machine and, more recently, electronic mail. But it has not only survived but prospered. It has a turnover of \$6.3 billion and employs 194,000 people: it has consistently improved its productivity: last year it made an after-tax profit of \$381 million and this week announced a freeze on prices — the longest price stability for 40 years. So what's the problem?

Government — that's what. The Conservatives recoiled from the controversy of privatisation and decided instead to milk it dry of revenues. Last year the PO had to pay over 75 per cent of its post-tax profits to the Treasury. The previous year Whitehall's rubber barons took 91 per cent. This is far higher than private sector dividends and robs the PO of essential expansion funds.

What should be done? The PO must be

given the commercial and financial freedom to become an international force in the communications revolution. It is far from perfect — especially in labour relations — but it is still one of the best run organisations of its kind in the world. It needs a government that will set the framework for it to succeed and not one that puts constraints on it at every stage. It should be allowed far greater freedom to exploit (and re-exploit) its network of counters which could be selling all sorts of services, financial and otherwise. It needs the freedom to develop commercial alliances in the UK and overseas and the ability to raise money freed from Treasury restraints. The Government should accept two recommendations of the trade and industry select committee: first, that dividends to the Treasury should be limited to 40 per cent of profits and, second, that the PO be converted into a publicly owned plc whose loans don't count against the public sector borrowing requirement. (It has now been established that it is open to government not to include PO borrowing against the PSBR if it wishes.) Who knows, a successful publicly owned plc might even start a new fashion. But don't bank on it.

London's leader

But why wait till the millennium?

TODAY Londoners can walk with a slight bounce in their step. Yesterday the Government unveiled the white paper containing its plan to bring democracy to the capital — 12 years after Margaret Thatcher removed the pesky Greater London Council with a stroke of her pique-filled pen. There is to be a mayor elected by 5 million voters, empowered to spend the £3 billion currently

lavished on London by ministers and bureaucrats in Whitehall. He or she will be held in check by a new assembly, with a remit covering the eight areas that matter most to Londoners — from land use planning to fire services, from arts to health. Under the control of the mayor are to be two new bodies, one dedicated to economic development and another — which will draw loud cheers from the city's millions of stressed-out commuters — to transport. Millions of Londoners who feel the capital isn't working will back genuine attempts to sort it out.

There are several nuggets of democratic innovation in the white paper. London is to get a blended form of proportional representation, one system for the assembly, another to choose the mayor. The motive here may well be cynical: an elaborate ruse to ensure the former GLC leader Ken Livingstone — who declared his interest yesterday by praising Mr Prescott's plan as an "exciting and radical job opportunity" — fails to make the final cut. Either way, FR — in Wales, Scotland and now London — is about to make British political life a lot more interesting.

There are misgivings. It's a pity the Government did not bring forward the date of the first mayoral election: now London will go into the millennium with no elected leader. Nor is there a clear sense of who will put London's case around the Cabinet table — essential as long as the mayor has no revenue-raising powers of his or her own. Still, Labour's realisation that a powerful executive needs to be checked and balanced by a separately elected chamber is great news. In London that translates into an assembly watching over the mayor. But if it works, the idea of separated powers and genuine scrutiny may spread — even, perhaps, as far as Westminster.

Letters to the Editor

Rude words for Mr Blunkett

IN case anyone is considering taking lessons in taste from David Blunkett following his tirade against Shopping and Fucking (Ministers in culture clash, March 24) I should point out that this is a man who, on Desert Island Discs, chose to spend the rest of his life with a Nazi Musikwart record.

David, I'm in closer by Patrick Marber at the Lyric right now. He's won awards for best new play and best comedy, and might go some way to convincing you that a piece of work is not without artistic merit merely because its characters say "fuck". Come and see it. I'll treat you.

Meanwhile, remember the words of that talented degenerate, Oscar Wilde: "Blessed is the man who has nothing to say and doesn't say it."

Neil Pearson
Lyric Theatre, London.

CONTRARY to Graham Smith's assertion (Letters, March 25), Shakespeare never used the word "arse" in his plays — nor any other of our unlovely monosyllables. Whether beginning with F, C or S. What Mercutio says in Romeo and Juliet (Act 2, Scene 1) is "O, that she were an open casket" — which in any case does not refer to her bottom. Its sexual meaning, and that of "medlar" which precedes it in the same scene, will become clear if you cut one in half from the top. If your greenroom is out of medlars, a Granny Smith will do.
Liverpool.

AS the late Lady Di seems to be promoting a brand of margarine, might we see others lending their names. Princess Margaret on a packet of fags? The Queen Mum on a gin bottle? Shepherd and Hall sponsoring Crufts?
Stephen Brooks.
London.

Testing time for TV sport

THE letter from Lord Gordon (March 25) defending the recommendations of his committee to delist the Test matches and much of the Wimbledon fortnight is most revealing and discloses why it is that they have failed to safeguard the true interests of the British sporting public.

If the Secretary of State did in fact "consult widely on the criteria to be taken into account in deciding whether or not to list an event", it is a remarkable affront to parliamentary opinion that no one I know was consulted in spite of the massive defeat we inflicted upon the previous government upon this subject, which they had the good grace to accept.

In the light of that overwhelming expression of parliamentary opinion it is extraordinary that the Secretary of State should establish his own criteria.

The listed events were never intended to be defined as those which "unite the nation" though they may well do that. They are events which excite the nation and provide enormous pleasure and interest among the sporting public, and which therefore need to be protected in the interests of millions of viewers who cannot receive or afford Sky Television. There is

no comparison in watching highlights of events when the result is already known and which are usually shown around the midnight hour.

Lord Gordon's committee has failed to protect the viewers, which should have been its prime purpose, and moves us nearer to a total Murdoch pay-view policy. It illustrates yet again that the sole concern of some governing bodies of sport is the bottom line.

Lord Howell PC.
House of Lords.

IF Lord Gordon's sophistry reflects the quality of mind which will decide which sports are to be shown to those who do not subscribe to BSkyB, then the sooner Murdoch takes over all sporting events the less painful it will be for us all.

His belief that the opportunity to watch edited highlights of test matches constitutes a safeguard displays a staggering incapacity to understand Test cricket. A few quick shots of batsmen being dismissed has as much relation to watching the ebb and flow of a Test match as a trailer has to seeing the complete film.

If the people who run our sports believe that selling the television rights to the highest bidder is the best way, then so be it. But it is highly likely

that English Test cricket, for example, would receive the kiss of death were it no longer available to all. A sport which is already worried about loss of support could not do worse than deny to the majority of young people the most important events in the calendar.

Wally Smith.
Beaconsfield, Bucks.

ENGLISH Test cricket, World Cup football, Five Nations rugby, Wimbledon, the Open Golf championship and the Commonwealth Games are events "with special national resonance". It is not enough for those who wish to deny us treasured moments of having "been there" and sensed history, they must ask us to pay for the emotional poverty.

I suggest that Michael Parkinson, Kate Stacey, Cram and all the other sporting "experts" on the Government's advisory committee stop pretending that they genuinely understand what live television coverage means to millions of BBC viewers.

Paul Horton.
Bath, E Sussex.



A step up for relationships

MY step-son and I each feel we want to celebrate Mother's Day together. And yet we hesitate, each reluctant to trespass on the important relationships that we have, he with his mother and me with my daughter.

We have, however, decided to celebrate wholeheartedly on what we have chosen to call Step Mother's Day each year on the Sunday after Mother's Day from now on. It will be for us a day to celebrate our relationship and our ever-growing love. We want to try to turn around the dreadfully negative image

that haunts so many step-relationships.

Although we, like many others, dread the evening of all religious and joyful times, we feel that in this era of step-families, we cannot ignore the importance and significance of these relationships. We recommend that cards should be printed, presents should be brought and the establishment of what can often be a difficult love celebrated.

Sam Collins.
Dr Freda Gardner-Collins.
Bristol.

Justice in jail

NIGEL Wilkins (Letters, March 25) is wrong to suggest the Home Office has yet to act on previous recommendations that Boards of Visitors should be stripped of their disciplinary function. In fact, BOVs ceased to have any disciplinary role in April 1992 after the Woolf Report of 1990 had argued that the administration of punishment was an inappropriate role for an independent body.

Lord Woolf recommended that the watchdog role of BOVs should be enhanced. But events at Wormwood Scrubs would suggest that the ability of BOVs to address prisoners' grievances remains seriously impaired.

Research in the British Journal of Criminology in 1994 showed BOVs were "still regarded by most inmates as largely invisible, irrelevant, aligned with the prison management, and ineffective".
Nick Flynn.
Prison Reform Trust, London.

BOARDS of Visitors no longer have any role in the adjudication system operated by the Home Office. But we are charged to report to the Home Secretary any matter on which we consider it expedient to report. And this, Mr Jarvis and the Board of Visitors at HMP Wormwood Scrubs, manifestly have done. Mary Blackburn.
Chairman, National Advisory Council of Boards of Visitors for England and Wales, Knutsford, Cheshire.

Orchestras demand tonic for South Bank complex

AS THE resident ensembles of the South Bank Centre, we welcome Culture Secretary Chris Smith's involvement in developing a new approach to the problems of the complex following the Arts Council's decision not to fund the Richard Rogers scheme from lottery funds.

It is imperative that the voices of the organisations that have made the South Bank Centre one of London's most important cultural centres is strongly heard in the process.

The growth of audiences at the South Bank underlines the complex's importance. There is now an urgent need to bring the auditoriums (including the acoustics), foyers, backstage facilities and building surrounds up to the standards of other concert halls around the world.

For almost 50 years, the complex has been essential to London's and Britain's artistic life. It draws more than 3 million visitors a year.

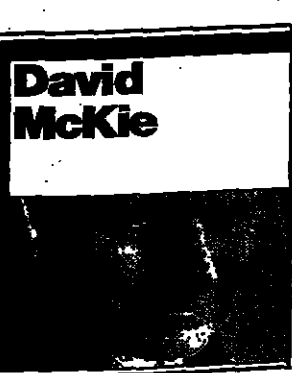
This popularity has taken a toll.

It is vital that steps are now taken to ensure that South Bank venues rate alongside the world's best concert halls. The South Bank complex must be so equipped that London can continue to demonstrate the new energy and the rich tradition for which it has long been famous.

London is not to lose its status as a major musical centre, it must invest in the infrastructure of one of its largest and most important arts flagships.

Serge Dorey.
London Philharmonic Orchestra.
Cathy Graham.
London Sinfonietta.
Stephen Lumsden.
Alban Berg Quartet.
David Pickett.
Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment.
Philip Pickett.
New London Consort.
David Whelton.
Philharmonia.

Fashion not passion



STILL smart enough for the Tories, apparently — but not smart enough for New Labour. The Labour "reluctant" decision to shun the town until the Winter Gardens — its traditional conference venue — and its hotels smarten up, tells us rather more about New Labour and the changing nature of party conference than

it does about slighted Blackpool. The Winter Gardens has been past its best for a good many years, but until now, it didn't matter that much, since invariably Labour conferences there were infinitely more exciting than those in Brighton or Bournemouth. The thronged red plush of the Winter Gardens is pure, old-fashioned theatre; the halls at Brighton and Blackpool are notorious passion-killers.

Labour conference used to be the parliament of the party where its leaders were held to account. Once a year, the rank and file liked to remind them: you wouldn't be up on that platform if it wasn't for us. Unless the party had elected them to its National Executive, even ministers of huge and powerful departments had to speak from the floor, raising their hands like the humblest constituency delegate to catch the chairperson's eye. "The delegate at the back in the red braces," I

once heard a chairman call, summoning a man whom everyone present knew was Anthony Crosland.

And should they be so jumped-up as to fall on reaching the rostrum to say who they were, retribution was instant. "Name!" the whole hall would roar, though everyone knew who it was already.

But now Labour Party conference is doomed to be more of a rally, less argument, more adulation. And all targeted at the world outside: television viewers, open to being impressed; visiting dignitaries, diplomats, legationals of big businesses who don't like to appear in shabby surroundings and want somewhere to stay where they know how to mix a cocktail and don't put cherries on sticks in glasses of wine they offer to ladies.

Ah yes, the hotels! As Michael White noted yesterday, they've improved, though they're still hardly

Deauville. In the very same place in which James Cameron described the sea as a thin grey line of sledge which mercifully brought the town to an end, he compared the then Northwick Castle hotel, where he was staying, to Stalin's Lubyanka. When he got back there that evening his luggage, packed, awaited him on the pavement.

IN THAT hotel, in the bad old days, the Guardian's kindly but irascible political correspondent, Francis Boyd, complained to a waiter he'd been at his breakfast table for 20 minutes and no one had taken his order. "Don't blame me, mate," the waiter said. "I'm just out of Strangeways."

The press and dignitaries might complain — indeed, did complain, incessantly. But it didn't worry the party's parliament much, since most of them didn't stay in hotels but in boarding houses.

The party's decision breaks another ancient and honoured rule: to meet in the South one year, in the North the next. That was done in the name of fairness, so that the North, which faced big bills to travel to Brighton one autumn, would have modest ones the following year to travel no further than Blackpool. The Scots, who tend to deplore the sycophantic tendencies of the new Labour leadership more than most, may find the rejection of Blackpool especially galling, emphasising the moral some Scots have drawn already (see the recent rise of the Scot Nats): that New Labour, despite the Scots at its apex, is at heart about as southern as England.

The trouble is that conferences are so swollen compared with what they used to be that very few towns can house them. Blackpool, Brighton, Bournemouth, perhaps Birmingham, where the National Exhibition Centre

could taken them if they wanted to go there — and that's about it. There was a time when even what used to be called the two main parties could cram into Morecambe or Scarborough. But in those days of course, the conference meant, essentially, those with delegate tickets.

What has grown down the years is less the representation of party activists than the party superstructure, the media army, and the visitors from business, industry and diplomacy. Weed out all the distinguished observers, the lobbyists, the people with something to sell, the aides-camp, the people with clipboards and the BBC experts interviewing each other, and you might even get the party back to sweet little Scarborough... But that, of course, is not going to happen. For nowadays, I'm afraid, these people, increasingly, are what these gatherings are all about.

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Analysis Casinos



George Monbiot
on brutality
in the dorm
8



No wonder he looks depressed

It's no fun being a loser in the gambling world. Especially when you're the casino industry itself, hit by a new 40 per cent duty. It's fighting back hard – but can it win? By Dan Atkinson

It is 2am in Chinese Soho, London, and the backroom action has only just begun. Mahjong pieces clack through a drizzle of Marlboro Light smoke and some serious money will cross the table between now and daylight. Somebody is taking a cut for arranging the event, and that puts the whole show outside the law.

Welcome to illegal gaming, 1998-style: small-scale, ethnically based, and making a minimal impact on public order and tranquillity. The crowds pouring out of Ronnie Scott's just up the road are oblivious to all this high-rolling; they are no more likely to visit an underground gaming den than they are to visit a cock-fight.

Squeezed between the nut-

cracker jaws of lower thresholds and higher rates, the casino operators claim, the delicate ecology of British gaming could disintegrate. They see a threat to the future of the system of taxation and regulation that has, since the late 1960s, kept the industry clean – and simultaneously creamed high tax revenues for the Treasury from generally contented players (many of them wealthy foreigners). The foreigners will, they warn, go elsewhere; the higher-class clubs will close; the knock-on effect will hit the dowdier provincial casinos. More worrying, they suggest, is that crooked operators will choose to duck out entirely from Mr Brown's taxes and set up shop outside the law.

No rationale has been given by the Treasury or Customs & Excise for the surprise move, beyond that of fortifying the revenue. As Customs told the Guardian yesterday, "it was a political decision". The industry fears that the Chancellor may simply disapprove of casino gaming. It fears also that, having inherited roaring black markets in both alcohol and tobacco, he is set fair to create a third in gambling.

Sources at the Gaming Board, the industry regulator with a fearsome reputation

for squashing illegal gaming, are doubtful. They point out that the tax increase – unlike those applying to alcohol or tobacco, for example – cannot, by law, be passed on to casino punters. The "price" of the casino game is the "edge" the house has over the player. And this edge is laid down by law, ranging from 0.6 to 5.6 per cent in blackjack through to 1.4 to 5.6 per cent in dice. Given that the operators cannot make the players share the burden of the tax increase, a regulatory source professes to being "surprised" at the idea of the tax-rise triggering a spate of casino closures. Surely only the casinos' shareholders will suffer?

It is not, however, that simple, as the British Casino Association and other interested parties are swift to point out. In any normal industry in which shareholders are prevented by law from defraying a tax hike with a price hike – a utility such as water, say – the air is likely to be thick with calls for "operating efficiencies". Unfortunately casino gaming is not a normal industry. At the top end of the market – the great London clubs such as the now-decimated Ritz, or Les Ambassadeurs – it is precisely the operating inefficiencies that pull in the high rollers. In other words, subsidised food,

drink and general ambience are the sweeteners that ensure the biggest players from Britain and the world will lose their money here, rather than anywhere else. And they will lose, over time – thanks to the "edge".

It is the competition for this relatively small number of international high-rollers that is at the heart of the crisis now facing the industry. Only 21 of Britain's 115-odd clubs are based in London, and not all of those cater for the high rollers. But two-thirds of the £2.6 billion national "drop" – the total exchanged for casino chips – is wagered in London, and two-thirds of that comes from either foreign players or from British players using foreign funds. Trim back on the champagne and cordon bleu for these types, and they may well be booking out through Heathrow, bound for more attractive locations.

CERTAINLY, the provincial casinos – whose typical clientele comprises a number of regular hard gamblers, plus larger numbers of businessmen on a night out – cater largely for a captive market. But they will generally not be paying Mr Brown's new 40 per cent rate. Those casinos with lower incomes pay a variety of lower rates of duty. Official figures show more than 80 per cent of gaming duty is paid by the 21 London clubs.

The industry not surprisingly, does not agree with Mr Brown's assessment that it is undervalued. But there is also a verdict shared by Professor

Neville Topham of Salford University, who has advised the Government on gaming. He has co-written a detailed report on gambling, in which he noted that the total paid in tax by casinos (including licence fees, VAT and corporation tax) amounted in 1996 to £138 million. This comes to 243 per cent of the casinos' after-tax profits – "a sizeable financial burden for any business", he concludes.

On that basis, with profits after tax of about £50 million, the casinos now face additional tax of £20 million a year, on Treasury figures, rising to £25 million. Shareholders are unlikely to be amused. One result could be that capital will leave the industry in search of better returns elsewhere. For those left holding casino stock, there would seem to be little alternative but to grin and bear lower profits, with the possibility that – as with other vices, such as tobacco – the Chancellor may be back for more in future budgets. As an industry source put it, "when is it going to happen again?"

But there is a possible escape route. The industry's trade body, the British Casino Association, is lobbying heavily and insists that it has not given up hope of reversing the increase in duty. But its main efforts currently appear to be elsewhere: in attempting to shrew off the regulatory burden placed on the industry at

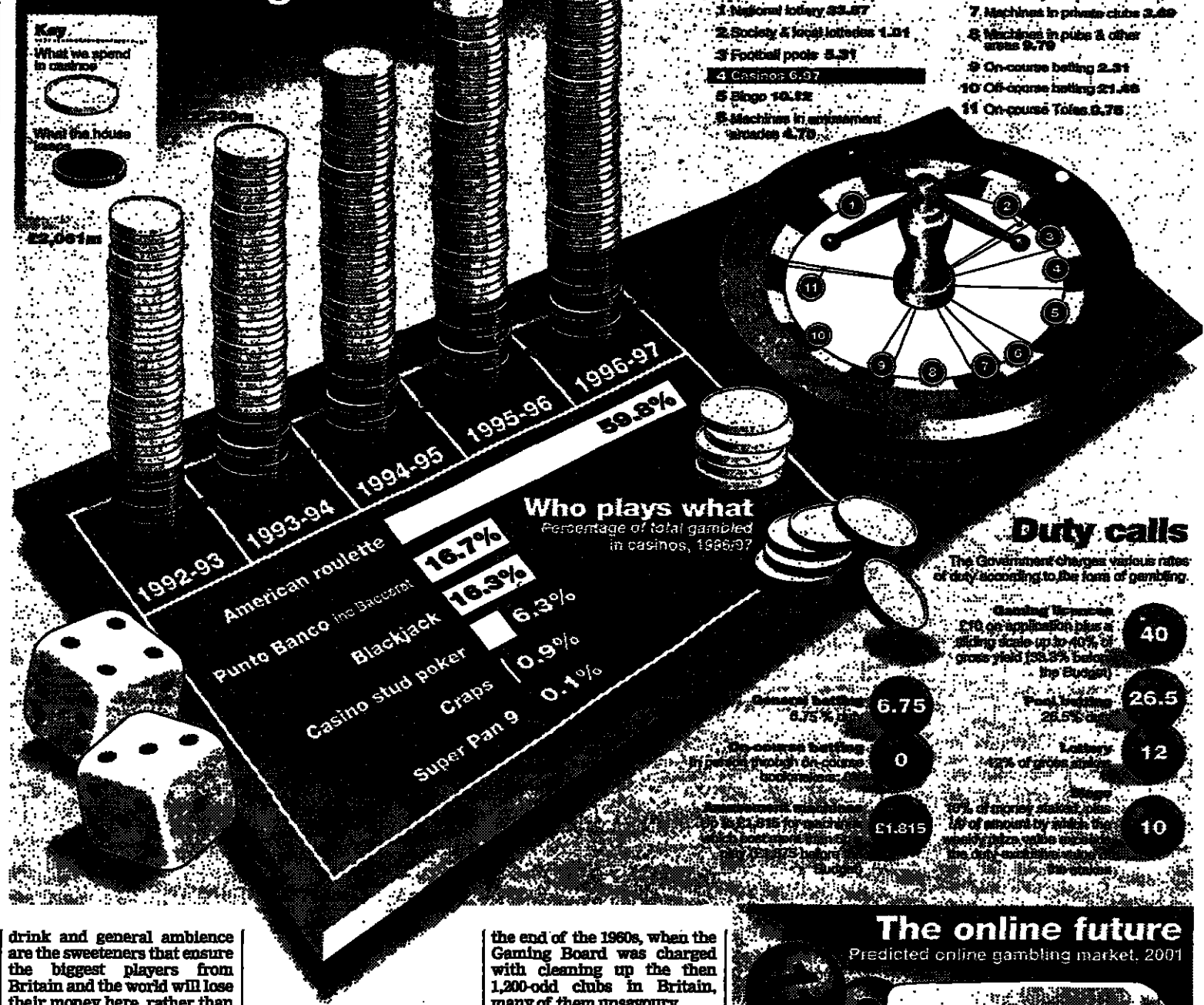
the end of the 1960s, when the Gaming Board was charged with cleaning up the then 1,200-odd clubs in Britain, many of them unsavoury.

In the battle for the high-rollers – the key to understanding the industry – rules and regulations are every bit as important as the funds available for winning and dining. Overseas locations – many of them new to legalised gaming – are freer and easier in allowing casino operators to subsidise high-rollers' air fares and hotel bills. In Britain, such behaviour could lose an operator its licence. Big meals and very large drinks are permitted, but overt payment beyond the bounds of the club are prohibited. Even inside the premises, decades-old rules bar more than a handful of jackpot machines. Even after some limited de-control by former Home Secretary Michael Howard, would-be members need to undergo a 24-hour cooling-off period before admittance.

Loosening some of these restrictions may not compensate the industry for the tax increase, the BCA says. It is impossible to calculate a cash value on deregulation. But it would go some way to soothing hurt feelings over both the duty hike and the lack of consultation beforehand.

Behind closed doors, regulators and regulated are moving towards a consensus. The Gaming Board is reasonably happy to allow three key demands of the industry: limited advertising, an increase in jackpot machines, and the possibility of allowing would-be members to apply by post.

Britain's big habit



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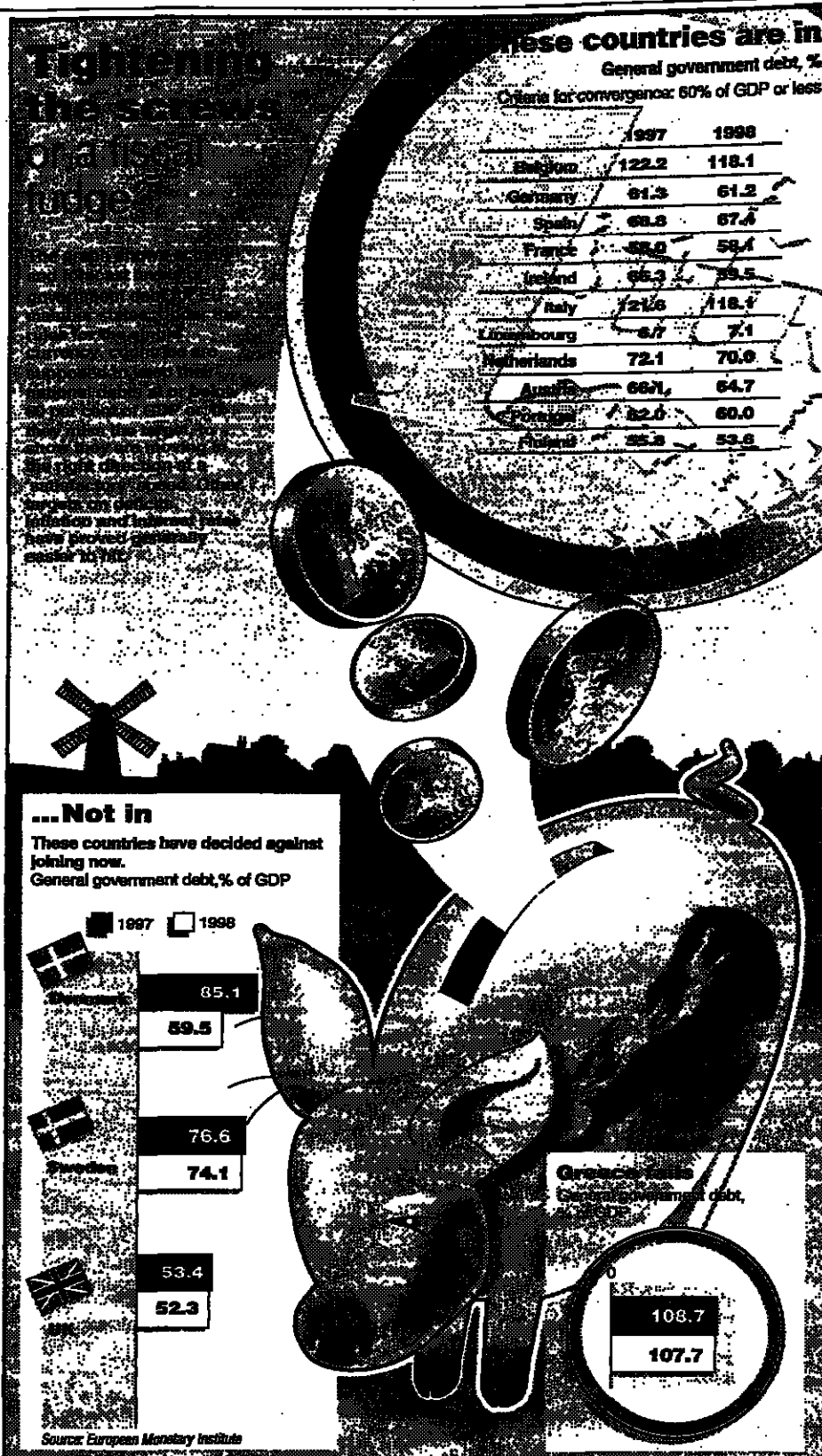
FinanceGuardian

Thursday March 26 1998

In Brussels, Frankfurt, Paris and Bonn, the mood yesterday was one of celebration. In London, there was the usual Commons row



In Brussels (above), the European monetary commissioner, Yves-Thibault de Silguy, announces that 11 EU countries pass the euro test. In Frankfurt (right), Wim Duisenberg of the European Monetary Institute says the hard work isn't over yet. In Bonn (bottom right), finance minister Theo Waigel hails the German success. In Paris (below), economy minister Dominique Strauss-Kahn answers questions. PHOTOGRAPHS: REUTERS AND EPA



Frankfurt Notebook

Single currency fans' last chance



Mark Milner

FORGIVE the tautology, but the only surprise about yesterday's pronouncements on the line up for monetary union from the European Commission and the European Monetary Institute were that there were no surprises. The EC, particularly in the person of the monetary affairs commissioner Yves-Thibault de Silguy, has worked hard to ensure a respectable turnout on January 1 next year.

Remember, back in 1996 the EC could not even raise the necessary majority to get the project off the ground the following year. Though the rules this time round are easier—in theory any two qualified countries would be sufficient—the commission was never going to miss the chance to hit the kind of total which would have been unthinkable a couple of years ago.

As far as the strict wording of the Maastricht treaty goes, Europe's single currency fans are drinking in the last chance saloon. There is no timetable for monetary union if the 1999 deadline is somewhat missed.

The EMU's position is both different and more complicated. As the forerunner to the European Central Bank—which will have a key role in trying to ensure monetary union will be an economic success—it is rather like a school teacher who has to establish credibility with the school inspectors (the financial markets) without upsetting the educational establishment which just happens to be made up of the pupils (the member states).

The class are decent overall performers, with a couple of swots (Ireland and Luxembourg), a laggard showing signs of promise (Greece) and the usual middle of the roaders. The real problems lie with a couple of pupils (Italy and Belgium) who are both weak in the same subject (debt and how to curb it) and a small clique, Britain, Denmark and Sweden, which just don't share everyone else's enthusiasm.

TEACHERS everywhere will recognise the EMU response: hand out a ration of praise for progress achieved but stress the need for continuing improvement. Attention to activities which are not strictly part of the EMU curriculum, reform of labour and product markets for example, would be beneficial to future development.

The end result is that the reports can be laid before ministers and heads of government with the general expectation that 11 pupils will get a gold star for effort and three will be excused games. It is easy to be flip. The efforts involved in meeting the Maastricht criteria have been formidable—though in some cases they have involved a noticeable degree of budgetary sleight of hand and an interpretation of the treaty's provision on deficit levels that supporters might label generous and euro-sceptics will condemn as a fudge. Fudged or not, however, they have entailed hard political choices.

But where have those choices left the European Union? In the short run, it means that the single currency looks certain to go ahead, on time, with a membership that makes up in length what it might lack in economic strength, or at least the solidity implicit in the more limited core EU line up (Germany, France, Benelux and Ireland) that, not so long ago, looked more likely. Enthusiasts for monetary union can comfortably expect to be dancing round the maypole as 11 heads of government sign on the single currency dotted line in just over five weeks.

SIGNING is one thing, delivering is another. Set aside a sudden rush of blood by the German constitutional court. Forget, too, the fading possibility that Chancellor Helmut Kohl is swept from power on a rising tide of German distaste for swapping the mark, the country's symbol of post-war success—for a currency which cannot guarantee DM-style stability. Mr Kohl may lose power, the opposition may play on euro fears but there is little chance the SDP will go the whole euro hog.

There are still rocks ahead. Getting the single currency through the administrative hurdles erected in Maastricht may vindicate the exertion of political will that has brought the euro thus far. The treaty's criteria, however fudged, may satisfy the financial markets or at least persuade them to give the project the benefit of the doubt.

That still leaves many of Europe's citizens to face more fiscal pain. Eventually, the straitjacket may bring benefits. There is a line of thought which reckons the Maastricht squeeze is economically beneficial, providing stability in areas like inflation and interest rates that is good for growth and jobs. A second strand has it that such restraint will force countries into much needed structural economic reforms.

Monetary union and its attendant constraints do not come with a guarantee of economic prosperity. The main driver is, and always has been, political. Wim Duisenberg, the head of the EMU, favourite to become the first head of the European Central bank—is clear enough about the need for continuing efforts to control budget deficits and to bring down debts.

Close to balance or even a modest surplus is his (and others) fiscal mantra. "We shall overcome," he said. That may have a zealous ring for one who is, and wants to continue to be, in the vanguard of monetary union. It how much, despite all yesterday's number parade at the EC and the EMU, the euro is an act of faith.

Flexible friend offers easy terms for British euro entry

Martin Walker in Brussels and Mark Milner in Frankfurt

BITAIN was yesterday offered accelerated membership of the new single currency when the European Commission president, Jacques Santer, promised "flexibility" on the requirements for joining.

Two years' probation inside the Exchange Rate Mechanism might not be necessary as long as the pound's exchange rate was stable. "Guaranteed stability on exchange rates can prevail over technical participation in the ERM for two years," an ebullient Jacques Santer said yesterday as he hailed the achievement of 11 EU nations in meeting the euro criteria.

The commission's recommendation of the 11 yesterday will almost certainly be endorsed by finance ministers of all the EU countries in the first week of May, and then by rubber-stamped by the European Parliament. The finance ministers' meeting will be chaired by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown, despite Britain's absence from the initial group.

The euro comes formally into being on January 1 next year as a banking currency, but notes and coins do not go into circulation until January 1, 2002.

The ERM had threatened to be Britain's big stumbling block after Mr Brown refused to join it, recalling Britain's humiliating expulsion in 1992. France had insisted that the rule of two years inside the exchange rate system be followed, but Finland and Italy were yesterday given the commission's approval to allow them in on the grounds that their debt levels were going down. And there was another "fudge" to bring in Germany even though its debt was going up.

The euro's first wave consists of Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Austria, Ireland, Finland, Belgium, Netherlands and Luxembourg. They form a new euro-zone of almost 300 million people, accounting for 20 per cent of global economic output and 19 per cent of world trade.

Indeed, Britain's economic performance contrasted sharply with Italy and Belgium, whose levels of government debt are more than twice the target of 60 per cent of gross domestic product. The rules were "fudged" to allow them in on the grounds that their debt levels were going down. And there was another "fudge" to bring in Germany even though its debt was going up.

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Union leaders raise stakes in workplace rights battle

Seamus Milne
Labour Editor

The Government must comply with its international obligations and reform the entirety of Conservative anti-union legislation, union leaders demanded yesterday, raising the prospect that the tussle between Tony Blair and the TUC over union recognition rights could widen.

Tony Young, joint general secretary of the Communication Workers' Union—and considered a Blair supporter—called on the Government to respond to repeated complaints by the International Labour Organisation, United Nations and Council of Europe that British law is in breach of international commitments.

With seven other unions, the 270,000-strong CWU—which was forced by law yesterday to repudiate an unofficial walk-out by Liverpool postal workers—is backing a "Reclaim Our Rights" campaign, to be launched on Saturday in support of wholesale revision of legislation.

John Hendy QC, a leading employment barrister, said earlier this month repeated censures against Britain for flouting the ILO Convention—of which Britain is a signatory. The ILO has found Britain to be in breach of the convention on 12 substantive points, including the ban on "secondary" industrial action and the right to sack strikers.

In December, the UN's Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights rejected the Government's proposal—expected to be included in a union recognition white paper—to allow sacked strikers to claim unfair dismissal at an industrial tribunal.

Some shops are several generations behind the Are You Being Served? vintage; others flaunt the international labels which grace every self-respecting western shopping mall. But retail branding is in its infancy. Establishing a popular brand now could be very lucrative if the Russian economy takes off, boosting car ownership as well as demand for western-style food shopping.

Yukos wants to boost its petrol retailing chain from 1,200 outlets to 5,000 in the next four years. Like many Russian businesses, it has trouble getting paid in its mainstream extraction and refinery business. For some companies this does not matter much, because Russian accounting does not recognise bad debts. But Yukos wants to raise more than \$1 billion a year over the next few years in the international capital markets, with a likely flotation in New York. Pretend profits will not do.

Whether the Russians are ready for a chain of Tesco Extras is another matter. Retailing here is polarised, and spares operations to tempt motorists.

"This is a big opportunity," said Alexei Golubovich, a Yukos vice-chairman and head of strategic planning. "But we don't have the management skills to do that. We are looking for a western partner who will contribute capital and those skills."

Tesco could fit the bill. Not content with taking market share from the oil companies with its superstore pumps, it has introduced Tesco Extra stand-alone forecourt operations. The UK supermarket leader has also gone into eastern Europe, pouring hundreds of millions of pounds into Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic.

Beetle builder in drive to buy Rolls-Royce

Nicholas Bannister, Chief Business Correspondent

THE British military government in northern Germany tried unsuccessfully to get British car firms to make it. A British commission then damned it in 1946 as having more flaws than a dog has fleas. Yet the original Volkswagen Beetle went on to sell 21.5 million and founded the fortune of Germany's largest car maker.

The tables are now turned and Volkswagen is determined to take over the most famous marque in British motoring and the country's best-known brand name—Rolls-Royce.

VW's chief executive, Ferdinand Piech, said yesterday that his company had made a formal offer for Rolls-Royce Motors, the luxury car company put up for sale by the Vickers engineering group.

Germany's three big car makers—Volkswagen, Daimler-Benz and BMW—have long been seen as the most likely bidders. But earlier this week Daimler-Benz, the owner of Mercedes, finally ruled itself out of the race.

BMW, which has the contract to supply the engines for the new Rolls-Royce and Bentley models, has made no secret of its desire to swallow Rolls but has yet to make an offer.

"BMW will put in a bid at the appropriate time," a spokesman said. He confirmed that the group would pull out of the engine supply contract if Rolls was taken over by a rival car firm.

Industry sources said that, under the contract, BMW would have to supply engines for at least a year if Rolls was taken over by another car group, and for even longer if it was acquired by a non-automotive company. This would give a purchaser time to find or develop an alternative engine.

Analysts believe that the competition from VW will force BMW, which last year made 1.2 million cars including Rovers, to offer more than the £250 million it originally intended. Vickers is seeking up to £400 million.

Tesco may be setting its sights on Russian tanks

Oil firm seeks western petrol pump ally, says ROGER COWE in Moscow

TESCO soon may become Russia's biggest petrol station operator, as the country's largest oil company, Yukos, seeks western help in expanding its distribution network.

Western-style petrol stations are still a novelty for most Russians, even though waiting lists to buy a car are long gone. On the outskirts of Moscow it is still possible to fill up from tankers parked at the side of the road. Many small businesses sell lubricants from tiny stands on the pavement.

But Yukos aims to catch up fast. It wants to launch straight into the kind of retail operation which the likes of Shell are only now experimenting with, marrying small supermarkets to traditional forecourt operations. Yukos may also throw in car maintenance

and spares operations to tempt motorists. "This is a big opportunity," said Alexei Golubovich, a Yukos vice-chairman and head of strategic planning. "But we don't have the management skills to do that. We are looking for a western partner who will contribute capital and those skills."

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Whether the Russians are ready for a chain of Tesco Extras is another matter. Retailing here is polarised,

TOURIST RATES — BANK SELLS

Australia 2.43	Germany 2.9610	Malaysia 6.05	Singapore 2.61
Austria 20.91	Greece 523.80	Malta 0.84	South Africa 6.11
Belgium 81.91	Hong Kong 12.80	Netherlands 3.3442	Spain 251.10
Canada 2.31	India 66.23	New Zealand 2.80	Sweden 12.96
Cyprus 0.86	Ireland 1.1854	Norway 12.35	Switzerland 2.426
Denmark 11.42	Israel 6.52	Portugal 203.79	Turkey 265.900
Finland 9.12	Italy 2.954	Saudi Arabia 6.17	USA 1.6382
France 9.96			

Supplied by NatWest (excluding rupee, shekel and riyal)

Football

Gascoigne is no problem, says Robson

Ken Ross
and Russell Thomas

BRYAN ROBSON watched Paul Gascoigne in his first Middlesbrough training session yesterday and then insisted he was not taking a £3.45 million gamble on a player prone to risk on and off the pitch.

Gascoigne scored twice in an hour-long match at Boro's Hurworth training complex, an occasion shrouded in tight security, before his latest manager laid down what he expects of the 30-year-old with the troubled past.

"We have our standards and our disciplines and Paul will stick to them or he will be trouble," said Robson. "But I don't expect trouble. I believe he will respect me as a manager — and I will respect him as a player."

"The incidents are few and far between these days. That's why I'm willing to take him on board. I'm sure he will give me a little bit of grief from time to time, but it will be worth it."

"Paul likes a few pints now and again, but he's one of the hardest trainers I've ever worked with. The other players will see that and it will be a big influence."

"The great thing about him is that he just loves his football. That's what we'll get from him — brilliant football... and the fans will love him."

Robson, having seen at first hand Gascoigne's current physical condition, will now examine the results of a highly detailed medical for the England midfielder.

Boro will parade Gascoigne at this afternoon's pre-Coca-Cola Cup final press conference. Whether or not he makes his debut on Sunday at Oldham, Robson's team were handed some encouragement last night with news of Frank Leboeuf's possible absence from Chelsea's defence.

The centre-back came off after suffering a shin injury near the end of France's 1-0 defeat by Russia in Moscow.

Liverpool yesterday admitted defeat in their attempt to find a suitable role for Mark

Kennedy by agreeing to sell him to Wimbledon. They have accepted an offer of £1.75 million for the Republic of Ireland winger and if Kennedy agrees personal terms he will move south before today's transfer deadline.

Liverpool also received offers from Nottingham Forest and Queens Park Rangers but only Wimbledon were willing to meet a non-negotiable asking price.

Everton are close to signing the striker John Spencer, who has been on loan at Goodison Park. Howard Kendall has agreed a fee with QPR, who want around £1.75 million, and hope the Scot will swiftly agree personal terms.

Kendall confirmed he is also trying to complete the £1 million signing of Sheffield United's Greek wing-back Vassilis Borbokis.

Manchester City's manager Joe Royle has recruited one Maine Road old boy, the 37-year-old midfielder Ian Bishop, from West Ham on a free transfer and is trying to secure another with a package deal for QPR's striker Mike Sheron.

Royle will have to offer Paul Dickov and Michael Brown, plus around £400,000, if Sheron is to return to the North-west.

The Norwegian midfielder Lars Bohinen completed a £1.45 million move from Blackburn to Derby while Neil Embien returned to Wolves. Embien joined Crystal Palace only this season for £2 million but has now signed a three-year contract with the FA Cup semi-finalists for an undisclosed fee.

Wolves also signed Robbie Slater from Southampton for an initial £50,000.

Kevin Keegan has finally got his man by taking Peter Stanger to Fulham on loan until the summer.

Keegan, who signed Beardsley at Newcastle and tried to recruit him several times this season, said of the 37-year-old forward: "It's a massive coup."

Beardsley, who had been on loan to Manchester City from Bolton, also links up with his former England team-mate Ray Wilkins at Fulham.



Lively up yourself... Stephen Malcolm is beaten to the ball by Wales's Mark Pembroke

PHOTOGRAPH: PAUL HACKETT

Scotland 0 Denmark 1

Laudrup finds home from home

Patrick Glenn

SCOTLAND's makeshift team had a predictably tough time at Ibrox last night against a Denmark side rated No. 3 in the world. By the end of a gruelling trial for Craig Brown's depleted squad, the sides appeared to be separated by much more than Brian Laudrup's stunning first-half goal.

Even before Laudrup put the Danes ahead eight minutes before the interval, Scotland were rarely able to match the threat posed by the visitors.

This difference stemmed partly from the home team's unfamiliar line-up, with Colin

Calderwood in midfield alongside Billy McKinlay and Scott Gemmill. The result of this deployment was an emphasis on defence, leaving Gemmill to supply the front two of Darren Jackson and Scott Booth.

The Forest player was pushing against the odds from the start against a Denmark team who, looking much more rehearsed, enjoyed the greater share of possession.

They had already menaced Jim Leighton's goal before Michael Schjoberg carried the ball through the middle and fed Laudrup to his right.

The Rangers winger moved towards the box and, from the 18-yard line, fired a right-foot drive low to the right of Leighton. It was a stunning

finish which brought boos from the home crowd.

Laudrup had been the target of derision since the start of the match, causing puzzlement as to whether his tormentors were naturally unsympathetic Celtic fans or Rangers supporters disaffected by his relative non-contribution to the Ibrox side's cause this season.

Scotland, though, should have profited from an earlier chance but the unmarked Jackson headed over from six yards after Christian Dailly had found him with a precise centre from Tom Boyd's throw in on the left.

The majority of what half-chances there were before the break had been created by the Danes, however, and only

Colin Hendry's well-timed challenges and an inaccurate header from Peter Moller had prevented the visitors from extending their advantage.

Scott Booth's replacement by John Jess at the start of the second half initially brought a zest to the Scots' front line that had not been in evidence during the first.

He showed a willingness and awareness hitherto missing when he fed Jackie McNamara on the right and sped forward for the return pass inside the area before driving into the side netting.

But the Danes continued to look more composed, compact and coherent, as exemplified by Moller's intelligent through pass to Brian Laudrup in the inside-right chan-

nel, requiring another impeccably timed intervention from Hendry.

Matt Elliott, the Leicester defender starting his first international, showed composure throughout and at least gave more of a test than others further forward. He worked well with Hendry and seems likely to be included in the final 22 for France in the summer.

SCOTLAND (3-5-2): Leighton (Aberdeen); Dailly (Derby), Hendry (Blackburn), Elliott (Leicester); McNamara (Celtic), Walker, Morris, Rennie, Gemmill (Forest), Huddleston (Blackburn), Galloway (Stirling), Boyd (Celtic); Jackson (Celtic), Booth (Bristol City), Jess (Aberdeen).

DENMARK (4-4-2): Krogh; Laurson, Moller, Schjoberg, Moller; Moller, Moller, Moller, Moller; Laudrup, Moller, Moller, Moller.

Burns accepts Reading task

Don Bees

WHILE Bobby Robson, the former England manager, spent yesterday considering a move to Holland to take charge of PSV Eindhoven for the second time, Tommy Burns stepped back into management with Reading.

Burns, the former Celtic manager, quit his job as youth development officer at Newcastle to take over from the caretaker-manager Alan Pardew at the struggling Elm Park club. Bobby Bullivant resigned last week.

Reading first offered Burns the job nine months ago when the joint managers Jimmy Quinn and Mick Gooding left the club. He verbally accepted but was tempted to Newcastle by Kenny Dalglish.

Burns, who was in charge of Scotland B when they beat their Welsh counterparts 4-0 at Aldridge on Tuesday night, said yesterday: "I can save Reading from relegation even though we have a tough run in our last seven games. I will strengthen the squad before tomorrow's deadline."

"As time went by at Newcastle I realised there were no opportunities there. I wanted to be my own man and get back into management."

Burns appears to be a popular choice with Reading fans. The supporters' club vice-

chairman Gary Purser said: "It's brilliant news. If anything, it's a relief from relegation, he can."

The Reading striker Stuart Lovell said: "I hope Alan Pardew will have a job with the club because he was the real success of the previous management team and the players would like to see him around."

Meanwhile PSV, where Robson was manager from 1990 to 1992 and twice guided them to the league title, have offered him a deal reported to be worth up to £15,000 a week to lead the coaching side when Dick Advocaat takes charge at Rangers next season.

A PSV spokesman confirmed that an offer had been made to Robson, who is currently director of football at Barcelona, following talks with the chairman Harry van Raaij in Spain. The spokesman added: "Robson is considering the offer we have made to him and we are hoping for an answer either by the end of this week or at the beginning of next week."

Robson, 65, has been coach at Sporting Lisbon and Porto as well as Barcelona and PSV and will be in England after the 1990 World Cup. He has been linked many times with a return to his home country but has resisted the temptation.

Results

Football

NATIONAL LEAGUE
Second Division
Millwall (0) 0
Aston Villa (1) 1

SCOTTISH LEAGUE
Second Division
Dundee (0) 0
Dundee United (0) 0

INTERNATIONALS
Scotland (0) 0
Denmark (1) 1

Wales (0) 0
Jamaica (0) 0

SPALDING CHALLENGE CUP
First Round
Dundee (0) 0
Dundee United (0) 0

SCOTTISH LEAGUE
First Division
Dundee (0) 0
Dundee United (0) 0

Wales (0) 0
Jamaica (0) 0

SPALDING CHALLENGE CUP
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Dundee United (0) 0

SCOTTISH LEAGUE
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Dundee United (0) 0

Wales (0) 0
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Northern Ireland 1 Slovakia 0

Long-shot Lomas

Michael Walker

THE Jack Charlton comparisons have not stopped since Lawrie McMenemy's appointment as Northern Ireland manager six weeks ago, but McMenemy went one better than his fellow Georgie last night.

McMenemy had his captain Steve Lomas to thank for the win at a sodden Windsor Park. Lomas's long-range shot eight minutes into the second half was the evening's champion moment, but very much against the run of play.

Nevertheless, the side ranked 98th in the world had beaten a team 63 places above them and that is not to be sniffed at. On the downside was the attendance — only 7,895 souls turned out.

New era it may be, but the Northern Ireland line-up was familiar. It was essentially Bryan Hamilton's team which almost gave McMenemy a perfect start, Michael Hughes' free kick hitting the cross-bar in the fourth minute.

That will have encouraged McMenemy, but the 15 minutes that followed must have caused him some alarm. The Slovaks could have scored four times, with the goal-

keeper Alan Pettis redeeming himself after one horrendous blunder with a brave block at the feet of Samuel Slovák.

With a defence including players from Northampton, Torquay and Chester City, McMenemy was probably not expecting Italian tightness at the back, but there were a couple more nervous moments before half-time.

The pattern continued afterward, Pettis saving long from Middlesbrough's Vladimir Kinder before Lomas intervened. Collecting the ball from Colin Hill, Lomas had few passing options in front of him and decided to shoot from almost 30 yards. The ball sped past Alexander Vencel and into the bottom corner.

It did not, however, signal a change in direction of attack, and it was only two smart saves from Pettis and an athletic diving clearance by Steve Morrow that denied the Slovaks an equaliser.

NORTHERN IRELAND (4-4-2): Pettis (Blackburn Rovers); Hamilton (Celtic), Morrow (Blackburn Rovers), Morrow (Blackburn Rovers), Morrow (Blackburn Rovers); Morrow (Blackburn Rovers), Morrow (Blackburn Rovers), Morrow (Blackburn Rovers), Morrow (Blackburn Rovers).

SLOVAKIA (3-5-2): Vencel; Zeman, Trnka, Trnka, Trnka; Trnka, Trnka, Trnka, Trnka, Trnka; Trnka, Trnka, Trnka, Trnka, Trnka.

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Sport in brief

Rowing

While Oxford were practising starts off a stakeboat at Putney yesterday, Cambridge showed flashes of what they might do on Saturday to extend their winning Boat Race streak to six, writes Christopher Dodd. They produced a truly awesome moment against Oxford, their reserves, when they lowered their rate yet gained half a length in fewer than 10 strokes.

Rugby League
Tulsa Tollett, who signed a four-year contract with Harlequins in October, is set to play for London Broncos in Sunday's Silk Cup Challenge Cup semi-final against Wigan at Huddersfield's McAlpine Stadium. The 34-year-old international, who made 25 appearances for the Broncos last year, remained on their playing register despite his transfer and will play initially on loan to solve their stand-off problem.

Snooker
Ronnie O'Sullivan coasted to a 6-2 first-round win over Jimmy White in the Benson and Hedges Irish Masters at Kill and missed on his failure to fulfil his exceptional potential more often, writes Clive Everton. "It's about commitment. Guys like Steve Davis and Stephen Hendry always have it but I don't. One day snooker means everything to me, the next I couldn't give a damn. That's just me."

Sailing
Lawrie Smith and the crew of Silk Cup yesterday cut back 6½ miles of BP Language's lead on the start leg of the Whitbread Round the World Race. The British boat was only 17 miles astern with 1,400 to go to the finish in Fort Lauderdale. Smith's lead over Knut Frostad's Innovation was 28 miles with a further three miles to Gunnar Krantz's Swedish Match.

Hockey
Harlequin Magpies of the National League First Division have been docked six points for playing an ineligible player, the Brunel UC student Anthony Fallick, in four league matches, writes Paul Rowley. As a result they have to take part in the league play-offs, having fallen from 14th to 19th in the final table.

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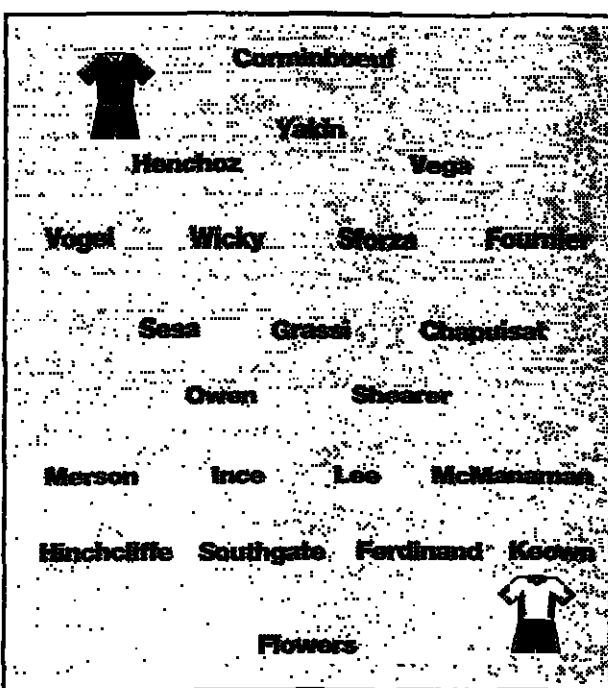
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SportsGuardian

World Cup warm-up



Switzerland 1 England 1

Merson's gift goal saves the blushes

David Lacey in Bern

A GOAL from Paul Merson, who up to that point had had a poor match, revived England in the Wankdorf Stadium here after Switzerland had gone ahead late in the first half through Ramon Vega and produced most of the creative touches in an uneventful game.

England teams often have definitive moments in the run-up to a World Cup. Last night's game was unlikely to be one of them, given the number of players Glenn Hoddle had lost from his original squad, but the team he fielded was still reasonably representative of an England side.

Rio Ferdinand, aged 19, started an international for the first time although not in the sweeper's role he normally occupies for West Ham; he played in the middle of an orthodox back four. In attack Michael Owen, the sole success when England lost 2-0 to Chile at Wembley six weeks ago, now started alongside Alan Shearer. With Steve McManaman and Merson included, Hoddle's latest team

looked more adventurous than his last.

England's approach was partly conditioned by the fact that for his first game in charge Gilbert Gress, the Swiss coach, played with three attackers. Ferdinand's job last night was to stick close to Marco Grassi, who had been a threat to England at the start of Euro 96.

England spent the early part of the match containing Switzerland's careful build-ups. Not that there was much immediate danger to Tim Flowers, although David Seas shot past a post.

When England did gain possession the fact that Robert Lee and Paul Ince were operating in central midfield, with McManaman and Merson going wide, meant that Hoddle's lack of a creative influence was all too apparent.

Midway through the first half Andy Hinchcliffe did find Merson in space on the left and a useful cross followed, but there was nobody in the penalty area to receive it.

Towards half-time McManaman moved inside, with Lee resuming his familiar England position on the right. This quickly gave England's



Not giving an Ince... the England midfielder gets the better of Stephane Chapuisat last night PHOTOGRAPH: STU FORSTER

attacks a more purposeful look but Switzerland still held the initiative and by half-time they were ahead.

An excellent recovery by Ferdinand deprived Ciraco Sforza of a shooting chance after a through-pass from Murat Yakin, the Swiss sweeper, had penetrated England's cover. But a corner was conceded and only half-cleared to Stephane Chapuisat, whose inswinging left-foot centre found Vega reaching the ball ahead of Martin Keown before nodding it down inside the far post.

There was more fluency and inventiveness in Switzerland's game. Sforza was their fulcrum and Vega caused England problems almost every time he stepped out from the back and brought the ball forward. Too many of England's movements were breaking down on Merson, whose touch let him down time and again.

Nevertheless, Merson it was who produced England's first real shot of the game after 61 minutes. Gathering a short free-kick on the left, he cut inside and drove the ball over the bar from fully 30 yards; not much of a shot, perhaps, but it was a shot for all that.

A better chance arrived seven minutes past the hour, courtesy of a mis-hit clearance by Joel Corninboeuf, the Swiss goalkeeper, which went straight to Owen, 35 yards out. Owen dashed for a gap in the middle of the defence only to be intercepted by Vega; McManaman waited the rebound over the bar.

Yet the moment, for England, proved portentous. Owen gave way to Teddy Sheringham in the 68th minute and by the 70th the scores were level. This time a clear-

ance from Corninboeuf clipped the advancing Sheringham's heel and reached Shearer on the right. Shearer's superb raking centre found Merson clear on the left and although Corninboeuf half-stopped the Middlesbrough player's shot he could not prevent it entering the net.

Keown, with a well-timed tackle, and Flowers, with a brave save, denied Chapuisat chances to restore Switzerland's lead as the game took on a new life.

SUBSTITUTES: England: Sheringham for Owen (80min), Barry for Merson (80).

Just give it to the chap with most initials



Frank Keating

THE king has abdicated... long live um, er, what'sname? Choosing the next England captain used to be far simpler. The succession followed a strict and limited line. Their

apparents were one-of-us oligarchs, namely public school boys or, at the very least, "amateur" cricketers. In the West Indies even more so: their first 11 Test captains between R K Nemes in 1928 and FCW Alexander in 1980 were all white men; that was qualification enough.

Even when Leonard Hutton had seemingly broken the pattern and become England's first professional captain, his tenure was made hell by such old-order sticklers as RWV Robins and FR Brown.

And after Hutton's pioneering, England at once reverted to a dozen more years of the traditional old boys' network, with their Test and touring sides being led out by, successively, Rev DSS, FDB, MCC, ERD and MUK (namely Sheppard, May, Cowdrey, Dexter and Smith).

And then in 1966, when Brian Clough was at last Hutton's first pro successor, he was dumped by Lord's at the first opportunity on the very eve of a major tour after hand-some winning six of his seven Tests as captain.

England's vice-captains have also been regularly and shoddily shown that being named No. 2 has no bearing at all on any succession. And who can doubt, however diplomatically ambivalent his wonky grin, that the Antiguan centurion Nasser Hussain is already out of the running?

The same has happened to such vice-captains as Denis Compton, Tom Graveney, Fred Titmus, Geoffrey Boycott, John Edrich, John Embury and Allan Lamb.

Oh, brave new world of Sharjah. Gone and forgotten. With Mike Atherton still looking for a game, England's one-day selection suddenly looks a complete pig's ear plus pickle on the side.

What is Hussain doing at home in Essex? You do not have to have watched more than a couple of one-dayers in Chelmsford down the decade to be familiar with his competitive radiance at the shorter

game, and particularly his electric fielding at squarish deep-gully.

And why retain good ol' lumbering Gus Fraser and out-of-sorts Dean Headley and send home the sprightly kids, unused and up for it, Ashley Cowan and Chris Silverwood? Crazy, if Fraser and Headley are going to take the Test match new ball in the summer they need a good rest and, in Headley's case, some serious work on his no-balling.

For starters, with the one-dayers' 15-over rule, where does Adam Hoolioake send his former captain in to bat? Sanath Jayasuriya he ain't.

FOR all the columns of ghosted pap written by England's touring players, including Atherton's in the Sunday Telegraph, you can rest assured that not one this weekend will come out with anything original or trenchant by way of naming his preferred successor other than sticking with the safe Alec Stewart. Or that whoever wants the job, and however desperately, would actually come out and state the reasons why he is best, his policies and the terms on which he would accept the seals of office.

It was different in the old days. Once when England were 3-0 down in the Ashes series of 1901, JWHIT Doulos, the selectors asked C B Fry to return as captain. Fry told the Evening Star he recommended instead his friend Lord Tennyson, who was offered the job on the very eve of the Lord's Test (as he put it in his memoir *Sticky Wickets*) "towards 1 am that morning in the Embassy Club in Bond Street over brandy and having knocked off a cigar or two".

Mr Lord, of course, was (briefly) a resounding success in that series and he later led two MCC teams to the West Indies, sending back unghosted gossip, verse and worse for Fleet Street's edification to publish in a syndicated column for the Associated Press.

Like the time the team dined at Government House in British Guiana: "Woolly Woolmer is Governor. His wife, Her Excellency, told me they have two boys at Eton. 'And I', remarked Woolmer from the other end of the table, 'have several in Georgetown', which did not go with a swing as my readers may imagine."

For this summer England should pick their very best XI, and the captain from it. So tossing up in the first Test at Edgbaston on June 4 is um, er, What'sname...

The succession, page 15

Jones' move ends Crazy Gang era

Russell Thomas on QPR's new player-coach

VINNIE JONES closed the Crazy Gang era and opened a new career he had thought long and hard about as he yesterday grasped Queens Park Rangers' offer to become player-coach in a move from Wimbledon worth £450,000.

Jones may have had his "heart pounding out of my chest" before taking a medical at Loftus Road. But as the 38-year-old attempts to breathe new life into ailing Rangers, a small but wonderful piece of London football history died.

"It's a huge wrench, a bit sad," Jones admitted as the last of the extraordinary 1988 FA Cup-winning Wimbledon team left. But sentiment was soon cast aside. "You can't live in the past. You have to go forward."

Jones has agreed a 3½-

year contract to work under Ray Barford, a former Wimbledon manager, with the player-coach's first task to help the Rangers sort at Huddersfield on Saturday.

The west London club have slumped to 18th, three points off the relegation zone, and desperately needed the personality, and physical and mental forcefulness, that the ebullient newcomer will bring.

Barford said he had signed the Welsh international to bring in a "leader, a player with enthusiasm, talent and experience". The Rangers manager also knows full well how the midfielder performed outside the top flight with Leeds as he helped the Eland Road club to promotion in 1990.

The one-time hod carrier



Jones... 'a huge wrench'

Czech Republic 2 Republic of Ireland 1

Czechs too strong despite Breen breakthrough

THE Republic of Ireland's inexperienced youngsters were overwhelmed by the ferocity of the Czech Republic's first real shot of the game yesterday.

Despite going ahead with a ninth-minute goal from the Coventry defender Gary Breen, the Irish finally could not contain the power and pace of their hosts.

Breen had already missed a half-chance by the time he latched on to Gareth Farrelly's flick-on from a corner by Gary Kelly and scored from close range. It was his second goal in 13 games for his country, the first coming against Holland in Rotterdam two years ago, but again it was not enough for victory.

For the second half Mick McCarthy introduced the Wolves forward Robbie Keane, who was physically a lot more know-how than he had. But these lads will be all the better for this experience," said McCarthy.

before the Czechs, in their first match under Josep Chovanec, scored the equaliser. The sweeper Lubos Kozel ran forward, inside his own half and slipped a perfect pass through for Pavel Kuka to reach the byline and give a low cut-back for Vladimir Smicer to score from close range.

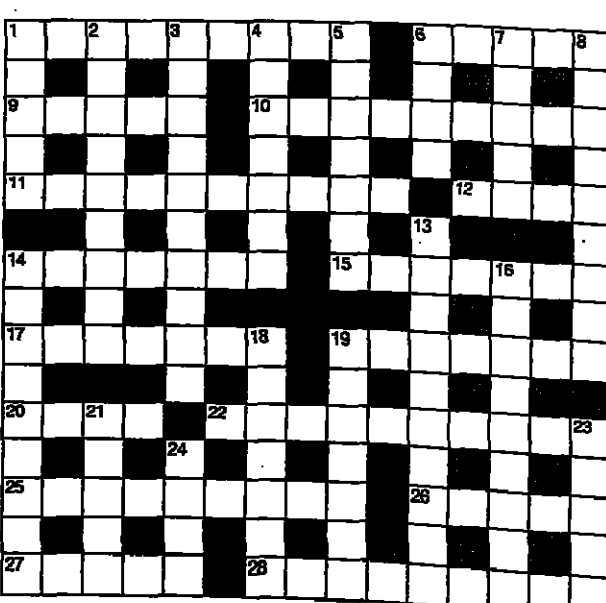
Vladislav Lokvenc replaced Kuka but proved equally dangerous. His towering header hit the foot of the post in the 62nd minute, then he booked the ball over Breen's head, ran around him and volleyed just wide in one outstanding phase of play.

Edward Laseta had been on the pitch only five minutes when he drove what proved to be the winner past the helpless Shay Given from eight yards, after Kozel's cross bounced off Smicer.

"The Czechs were physically much stronger and had a lot more know-how than we had. But these lads will be all the better for this experience," said McCarthy.

Guardian Crossword No 21,232

Set by Crispa



Across

1 Action about fourth estate is discouraged (9)
6 A way a politician can create an impression (5)
9 Greek department of organisation with fur problem (5)

10 At sea for the most part (2,3,4)
11 It's the same old story — but note the appeal! (10)
12 Home for a large number of children (4)

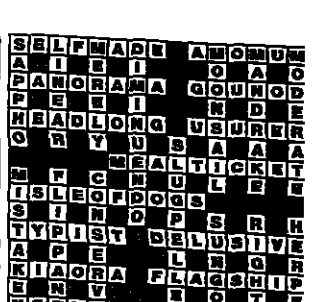
14 Austere man turning up on wrong train (7)
15 Most preposterous attempt to get everybody in (7)
17 Having a roof over one's head (7)
19 A soldier in nasty accommodation may well be rhymed (7)

20 Prison makes many mature (4)
22 Give voice about a parent being overwhelming (10)
25 A lot stood out for natural growth (9)
26 Go in a little — a very little (5)

27 Downy, and that's essential for a youngster (9)
28 The income women tend to get organised (9)

Down

1 Theatrical make-up (5)
2 Drippers ordered without direction produced water in droplets (9)
3 Horsemanship, or a mathematical statement about it (10)
4 The boy admitting a leaning for rhymes (7)



CROSSWORD SOLUTION 21,232

5 The city tried to change (7)
6 Watch money trickle away (4)
7 A strike to cause embarrassment (5)
8 The American detective is more colourful and heavyweight (9)
13 Guy's after dramatic work, though really no friend of work (10)
14 A top man not backing up university in the USA (9)
16 Scooped after the Continental mini broke down, being put out (9)
18 Undistinguished character (7)
19 Seat five hundred as arranged (7)
21 A note to file — "Hold on" (5)
23 How the Scots cry hail (5)
24 View in one's pyjamas and dressing-gown (4)

Solution tomorrow

22 Shook? Then call our solutions line on 0991 998 228. Calls cost 50p per minute at all times. Service supplied by RTS.



Nick Hornby is beginning to sound like a dumbed-down Iris Murdoch: the books repeat again and again the same convoluted emotional relationships and re-heat the same strained philosophy.
Ian Sansom reviews *About A Boy*

Books, G2 page 9